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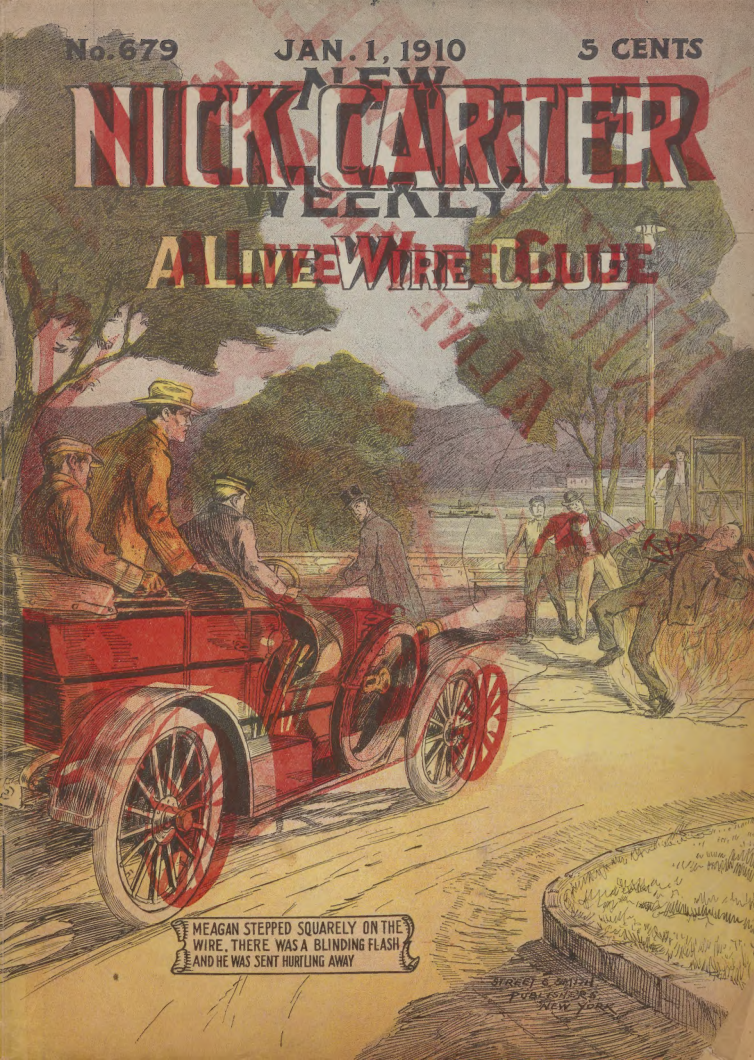
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A Live Wire Clue


MEAGAN STEPPED SQUARELY ON THE WIRE. THERE WAS A BLINDING FLASH AND HE WAS SENT HURTLING AWAY
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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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A Live Wire Clue

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE BADMINGTON CASE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT SURPRISE.

The Liberator Safety Deposit Vaults are under the banking rooms of the Liberator Trust Company, on lower Broadway. From eight-thirty in the morning until mid-afternoon—sometimes until five p. m.—the safety deposit department of the great banking institution is a busy scene.

Banking hours—so called—when a man can deposit and draw money "on call" are usually from ten till three o'clock. But there are a great many people—and legitimate business people, too—who sometimes wish to get at ready cash, or other valuables, before and after the regular hours. Therefore the popularity of a safety deposit place like that of the Liberator Company, in the heart of the wholesale business district.

Three men, coming straight from the frowning structure known as the Tombs Prison, where they had been in consultation with a man charged with a capital crime, came straight to the Liberator Vaults soon after the luncheon hour and went down into one of the small, cheerfully furnished rooms arranged by the institution for its patrons.

This trio consisted of Nicholas Carter, the renowned criminal investigator; Norbeck D'Ellery, an equally famous criminal lawyer, and Alfred Meyer, an attorney, respected alike by bench aad bar for his acumen and legal ability.

Mr. Meyer was a dapper little man, with dyed hair, a made-up complexion, effeminate ways, and a lisp—this latter practiced only when he was not excited. When he really put his mind on a legal question, and got interested in his discourse upon it, he forgot the lisp!

Mr. D'Ellery was a tall, black, harsh-looking man. He came from Martinique, and he did not deny that there might be a strain of negro blood in his veins. Dumas, the great French romancer, was a French negro. D'Ellery had proved the strain was no handicap to him in life. He had succeeded eminently at the bar, and was now one of the most noted criminal lawyers in New York.

Nicholas Carter closed the door of the small reception room, waved the two lawyers to seats, and began to speak in his concise, brisk manner:

"Gentlemen, a few minutes more and, I hope, my hands will be free of this case. My interest in it really ends when I put this document which Milton J. Hyburn declares he owns, and which I believe he does own, in your haads.

"If the formulas in experimental chemistry, invented by Hyburn's father, are as valuable as the late Rufus Badmington, of Badmington & Badmington, seemed to believe, and Mr. D'Ellery can dispose of some of the secrets contained in the document for his client's benefit, he will have the wherewithal to conduct a broad defense of Hyburn—he will be able to fight the district attorney to a finish.

"Milton J. Hyburn killed John Badmington—there is no gainsaying that. He lurked in Central Park, caught his victim in a lonely spot, and felled him to the ground with a blow from a red lantern, that he (Hyburn) picked up near the scene. He had intrusted this precious document in John Badmington's hands, and John and his brother had conspired to keep the valuable paper and to cheat Hyburn out of his rightful emolument.

"I ran Hyburn down myself. It was my good fortune, too, when engaged by Mr. Rufus Badmington, to find the lodgings John had occupied while in hiding with the paper, in the Deccan House—room three hundred and thirteen. The clue to the document's real place of deposit was hidden in that room, and Rufus Badmington knew where to look for it.

"While he was thus secretly engaged, and I was momentarily 'asleep at the switch,' a certain second-story and hotel thief, 'Slippery Pete' Lorimer, chanced to be in a position to watch the proceedings in room three hundred and thirteen. He believed Mr. Badmington was searching for some negotiable treasure, and he climbed the fire escape, opened the window of the room, and leaped in just as the gentleman had secured the bit of paper on which his brother had noted the hiding place of the chemical formulas.

"Whether the excitement of the search, or the sudden shock of being faced by the crook, brought on the stroke of apoplexy, it is a fact that Rufus Badmington dropped dead at the feet of Pete Lorimer. Pete, frightened half to death himself, seized the memorandum from the dead man's hand and fled. We secured him shortly after, and he has been sentenced for a short term for breaking and entering, and on the strength of his general reputation.

"Here is the paper that Pete gave me, and which he said he took from the hand of Rufus Badmington. It was John Badmington's message to his brother about the formulas which they had agreed to steal from Milton J. Hyburn," and Nick ended his explanation by reading aloud from the slip of paper he held in his hand:

"'RUFUS: It is in box eighteen-twelve of the Liberator Safety Deposit Company. No key needed. Combination set to thirteen-three-thirteen. J. B.'

"Now, gentlemen, I have called Mr. Meyer into the matter to be my witness, and look out for my end of the case. We have no legal right, or court order, to touch the contents of box eighteen-twelve in this institution. It was engaged by John Badmington, and should be given over to the possession of his heirs—whoever they may prove to be.

"But Mr. Meyer is agreed that, morally, the evidence shows that the secret formulas belong to the man now held for the murder of John Badmington. He needs money. Mr. D'Ellery will need money to conduct his case in court. It is only right that Hyburn should have to use, at this time, whatever money can be made out of the inventions of his father. Therefore, I have assumed the responsibility, and Mr. Meyer backs me in it, of handing this valuable document over to you, Mr. D'Ellery, for you to make the best use of possible for your client. Come with me, if you please, gentlemen, and we will open box eighteen-twelve. I happen to be well known in this institution, and what I do here will not be questioned. This is one of the small boxes and is easy of access, the depositor being able to get to and open his own box at any time during the business hours of the institution, and without question."

The two lawyers rose when Nick ceased speaking, prepared to follow him.

"Lead on, Mr. Carter," said D'Ellery, in his deep voice, which, together with his impressive physique, always held juries and audience enthralled when he pleaded a case.

"Really, Mithter Carter," drawled Meyer, "I am glad you have come to your conclusion. You and Mr. D'Ellery could have done this alone—really you could. You don't need my help, Mithter Carter."

"I might later, Mr. Meyer," said Nick dryly. "I know that we are doing an unprecedented thing."

"And he is trying to get us criminally involved," chuckled D'Ellery.

Nick walked into the department where box 1812 was. There were several patrons of the institution about, and some employees, too, including a special officer in gray uniform at the door. He bowed to Nick Carter, and passed the detective and his companions into the long apartment without question.

Some of the customers were sitting at tables, sheltered in little booths from the curiosity of others, examining the contents of the boxes which, when unlocked, could be lifted out of the steel case entirely and carried where the owner of the box wished.

Nick walked straight down the line until he saw the figures "1812" painted in crimson on the enamel front of the deposit box. He had seen them before. He had taken the trouble of coming in here once and staring that box out of countenance! Really, Nick Carter was as much interested to find out if the formulas deposited in the box were as valuable as both Hyburn and the Badmingtons believed, as he was desirous of giving Hyburn a chance to escape the electric chair.

Just as Nick was about to lay his hand on the nickel knob, and set the combination according to the instructions on the paper which he had obtained from the second-story "gun," Pete Lorimer, who, in turn, had taken it from the dead hand of Rufus Badmington, a figure pushed between the detective and the row of boxes. It was the figure of a man—a lean, shabby-looking person, who wore rather mussy linen, a frightful hat, carried an umbrella under his arm, and had perched upon his high, blue nose an enormous pair of spectacles. Really, he was a caricature of a man. If one had seen him on the stage—and he looked as though he wore a stage make-up—one would have expected him to carry a butterfly net and a "bug

box." He was a freak! He was plainly nearsighted, and, in spite of the glasses, he got his nose very near the numbers on the boxes, in his endeavor to see the right one. It looked as though he were smelling out his own.

Nick stepped back, with a smile at his companions. The odd-looking man was totally unconscious that he had been rude and had pushed in ahead of the detective.

Suddenly the latter, however, experienced a shock—a veritable upheaval of surprise! The strange man in black stood directly in front of box 1812. He placed his hand on the knob. He turned it several times, this way and that, evidently working out a combination. And then, box 1812 was detached from the steel frame into which it fitted, and the stranger lifted out the box.

CHAPTER II.

PROFESSOR LETTERBLAIR PRATT.

The tableau of the trio—the detective and the two lawyers—would have been most amusing for any observer who knew the circumstances. Nick, and D'Ellery, and Meyer stared at each other for half a minute in the blankest amazement.

"That was done easy!" ejaculated the tall criminal lawyer.

"Mithter Carter! Mithter Carter!" cried Meyer. "How do you explain that?"

"I don't—yet!" returned Nick, under his breath. Then he took several strides after the shabby man who had removed Box 1812 from the vault. He laid a restraining hand upon his arm.

The old fellow flashed the detective a quick, birdlike look, blinking through his huge goggles in his nearsighted way, but seemingly not at all troubled by being accosted.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Nick. "Will you favor me with your name?"

"Of course, of course!" squeaked the man in black.

He clapped the box under his arm, squeezing it tightly to his side, and fumbled in his pocket for a dog-eared card that he produced and handed to Nick.

"Perhaps you've heard of me, perhaps you've heard of me!" he repeated—for he "doubled" on almost everything he said.

Nick read on the soiled card:

"Professor Letterblair Pratt, LL. D., Ph. D."

"Professor Pratt," said the detective, not knowing whether to be amused or suspicious, "pardon me for asking, but how long have you had access to that box?"

The professor blinked at him in seeming amazement, but he stepped back from Nick, too, and his countenance was suddenly suffused with red.

"What do you mean? what do you mean?" he squealed.

"This box, I mean," said Nick, somewhat sternly, tapping the receptacle held so tightly under the man's arm.

Professor Pratt skipped backward out of Nick's reach in a hurry.

"This box? this box?" he demanded, with something that looked to Nick very akin to fear.

The gray-uniformed watcher at the door saw what was going on, and he left his post and approached curiously.

"What's the matter, gentlemen?" he asked, but looking more particularly at Nick. He knew the detective, and naturally feared that some trouble was afoot.

Nick's manner had already undergone a change. He turned smilingly to the officer.

"I was asking a question of Professor Letterblair Pratt," he said. "Of course, you can tell me, Simons, just as well. How long has box eighteen-twelve been held in the professor's name?"

"That is a strange question, Mr. Carter," said the officer, in round-eyed surprise.

The professor was skipping back and forth, advancing a step and then retreating, in ridiculous excitement. "What does he mean? what does he mean?" he continued to demand.

"I have a good reason for asking," Nick said, still speaking to the officer. "These gentlemen and I," indicating D'Ellery and Meyer, "are empowered to open a box here in which is deposited a valuable paper belonging to a prisoner now in the Tombs—Mr. D'Ellery, here, is his attorney."

"Well, sir?" queried Simons.

"The number of the box—as given to us, I mean—is eighteen-twelve."

At that the professor squealed again and skipped back, hugging the box in both arms as though it were a baby he were carrying.

"I never heard the like! I never heard the like!" he exclaimed.

"But it seems Professor Pratt has the combination of the box, Mr. Carter," said Simons falteringly.

"True. I see he has. And, of course, we may be mistaken in the number. I merely wish to know if you recognize Professor Pratt, and if you know how long he has been a customer of the institution?"

"It is an insult; it is an insult!" murmured the professor.

"Why, the professor has been coming here for some months," said the officer. "That I can swear to. The books will show how long he has held that box, of course. You had better see Mr. M'Kimm, sir."

"The gentleman had better mind his own business, his own business!" squeaked the professor, with sudden bravery. "The safety deposit officers are bound to tell nothing at all about their customers, nothing at all! I'll see Mr. M'Kimm myself, I'll see him myself!"

Thus exploding rather than talking, the man in black skipped back to the vault, thrust Box 1812 into place, snapped on the lock, and started at full speed for

the stairway, and, evidently, for the superintendent's office.

"Mithter Carter! Mithter Carter!" cried the excited Mr. Meyer. "Are you going to allow him to escape?"

"I can get Professor Pratt if he is wanted," grunted Nick, standing irresolute. "That isn't what troubles me."

"Well, Carter," said D'Ellery, with a sudden explosive chuckle—always when the famous criminal lawyer laughed it seemed to hurt him—"your main trouble should be that somebody has made a fool of you, and you have passed on the joke to us—eh, Meyer?"

"This is no joke, gentlemen," returned Nick Carter gravely. "I have seldom been more at fault—and I have made mistakes often—in my whole life. Frankly, I do not understand it—I have no idea what the answer may be to this puzzle!"

"There is something queer about that Pratt," declared Meyer obstinately.

"That is an easy matter to discover. I will see Mr. M'Kimm personally, and he will be able to tell me one thing or another about Mr. Pratt."

"You got the box number wrong, Carter," said D'Ellery.

"Here is the paper," said Nick promptly. "The very paper I got away from Pete Lorimer, and which he found in Rufus Badmington's hand. Read the number yourself Mr. D'Ellery."

"It certainly says eighteen-twelve."

"It certainly does," pursued Nick. "And John Badmington would not have been likely to deliberately fool his own brother, would he?"

"It would not seem so," admitted the criminal lawyer.

"Well, there certainly is thomething very peculiar about this, Mithter Carter," ejaculated Meyer.

"That is just as sure as you live," admitted Nick. "What will you do?" asked the other lawyer.

"See M'Kimm first of all. Of course, the officers of this institution can only be made to tell anything they may know about their patrons, and their patrons' affairs, through a court order."

"You don't want any court mixing into this case, Carter!" exclaimed Meyer quickly.

"I realize that, sir, and note your warning."

"You are in a very peculiar situation. In fact," said the little lawyer impressively, "we were here on a strictly illegal piece of business. I am not sure but that what we intended to do could be technically classed as 'breaking and entering.' Only, you were so positive, Mr. Carter, that the actual subscriber to that box was dead and nobody else knew about it, and its contents; therefore I agreed to be present at the illegal proceeding."

"And what will you do about it now?" asked D'Ellery curiously.

"I'll go back to my office instanter!" exclaimed Meyer. "I wash my hands of the whole proceeding. Don't come for me to attend another such séance, Carter, for I shall refuse—I shall refuse!" declared the little man, and he turned tail and ran up out of the vault room as he finished speaking.

"Well!" ejaculated D'Ellery, turning to Nick. "You have heard the opinion of the Great Mogul! What will you do?"

"I am balked for the moment. But, even if I did not want to secure that document for your client, I certainly should investigate this business. It is too mysterious to overlook."

"What can I do to help you?" demanded the criminal lawyer.

"That's the talk!" exclaimed Nick. "You do not give up hope yet?"

"I never do—until my man is hanged," returned D'Ellery grimly.

"That's a pointed observation—in this case," said Nick. "I suppose you realize, as well as I do, that about the only chance Hyburn has of escaping the chair is through the discovery of this document and telling the story of it, and of the Badmington conspiracy, in court?"

D'Ellery looked straight at the detective, but shook his head slowly. "I never express an opinion of such scope, Mr. Carter," he said, his thin-lipped mouth widening. "But I am interested in the finding of the paper. And if it proves anywhere near as valuable as my client claims, and we can dispose of the knowledge it contains for hard cash, your bill for services will be honored, Mr. Carter."

CHAPTER III.

THE WEATHERCOCK OF SUSPICION.

When the two lawyers had left him free—free to think and to act—Nicholas Carter wasted little time in indecision. That was not his way. As he had told Mr. D'Ellery, he had an added incentive now for following the trail of the lost formulas, the ownership of which Milton J. Hyburn claimed. He was not alone desirous of restoring the documents to its rightful owner, even though that owner was an assassin, but the mystery of the mix-up in the safety deposit vault box was sufficient to spur the detective to trace the matter to a sane and satisfactory conclusion.

Immediately on learning that 1812 seemed to belong to somebody beside the dead John Badmington—or "Mr. Minturn," as he had probably been known at the time he was supposed to engage the box—there opened before Nick Carter's mind several paths of inquiry and suspicion.

Could John Badmington have made a mistake in the box number?

That seemed to be the first and simplest explanation of the blunder—if blunder there was—that Nick had been drawn into. The 1812 on the scrap of paper the detective possessed was plain enough; but when

it comes to figures, a good many people easily get twisted.

Nick, with this idea in his head, started for the office of Mr. M'Kimm, who was the "overlord" of the deposit vaults of the Liberator institution. The odd-looking man in shabby black was not in sight when Nick came to M'Kimm's door, and he found the superintendent alone, but looking amused and puzzled.

"Great Peter, Nick! Are you the Mr. Carter who has been raising a row downstairs?"

"I must plead guilty," returned Nick.

"You certainly got that old fellow's goat."

"What old fellow?"

"That chap who calls himself Professor Pratt," said M'Kimm, referring to another dog-eared card that lay before him on his desk.

"Is that his name—Letterblair Pratt?"

"So he says."

"Sounds like a fake," observed Nick. "Who is he?"

"Ahem! Now, Nick, you know very well that you have no business asking me such a question. I am not here to discuss the affairs—the private affairs—of our customers."

"No. I don't suppose you are. And I see that the professor has been here ahead of me."

"Well, he has."

"And warned you to decline to say anything to me?"

"Oh! That is going too far," said M'Kimm hastily. "I should have refused any particular information about one of our customers, Nick, in any case—unless, of course, you could show me that the courts demanded it."

"Now, that's an old bluff," grumbled Nick. "I'm not going to ask you anything you can't answer. I want to know if he is Professor Pratt."

"He's the only one I ever saw."

"And what kind of a professor is he?"

"I don't know. I've heard a barber called a 'tonsorial professor'; but Pratt doesn't look like a barber."

"No; but he needs one," decided Nick shortly. "Where does he live?"

"I cannot tell you that."

"You mean, you will not?"

"Same thing."

"Well, I can trace Professor Pratt if I think it necessary," decided Nick. "You can tell me how long he has had a box here, can't you?"

"He was particular to request me to answer no questions you—or anybody else—might put. Really, Nick, my mouth is shut."

"Then we'll let Pratt go—for the present," said the detective, becoming more cheerful. "Can you—without smashing your oath of office to flinders—let me see a list of the box holders in the safety deposit vaults?"

"I most certainly cannot, Nick!" answered M'Kimm. "You shouldn't ask it."

"Perhaps not. I'll put it differently. Will you refer to your list and see if at any time within the past six months—not longer ago than that—one John Badmington hired a box—and the number?"

"I don't remember such a name," said M'Kimm; but he reached for a private book, and went through several closely written pages, reading the names inaudibly while Nick patiently waited.

"The name Badmington doesn't occur," he said, at last. "I doubt if we have such a person on our books."

"Look up Minturn, then," said Nick quickly.

M'Kimm did so—with a like result. "Of course," said he, "we demand a name and address from every person who hires a box. But those addresses and names are only for reference. We do not look into their genuineness on the spot. I presume there may be a hundred names on our books that are fictitious. There is no crime in it. The depositors may have very good reasons for wishing to deposit valuables without their friends or family knowing about it. Of course, if any real trouble arises—if the depositor dies, for instance—such a proceeding is bound to cause trouble and delay. But that is his own risk, not ours. We let him the box; he pays quarterly, or half yearly, or yearly in advance. In some cases we make a flat price for the rental of the box for a term of years, and may never see the lessee in all that time. He is shown his box, the mechanism is explained to him, he sets the combination as he may wish, and then nobody but he can open that box without smashing it."

Nick was not particularly interested in this dissertation. He knew it all before.

"Will you tell me who holds box eighteen-twelve at the present time?" he asked suddenly. "Perhaps the numbers have got twisted."

M'Kimm referred to another record book, and, after turning the leaves a bit, evidently found the number. But he closed the book again before speaking.

"I did not know but the box might be unused at the present time," he said, smiling. "But I find that it is held by a very old patron of the vaults—a lady, well known, highly respectable, and I wouldn't tell you who she was for a million!"

"All right!" said Nick. "Enough said! She evidently is not mixed up in this."

"But what is it?" asked the superintendent. "It must be something mighty queer, Carter, when you are so puzzled over it."

"It is queer," admitted the detective.

"What is it?"

"I'll tell you—on one condition," returned Nick, smiling grimly at him.

"Ah?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all about it when you tell me all about Professor Letterblair Pratt," and with a wink and a nod, the detective walked out of the office.

CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING A CLUE.

Nick Carter decided to put his suspicion of the shabby "professor" and his business in the Liberator Safety Deposit Vaults to an immediate test. He telephoned for his first assistant, Chickering Carter, who had already been engaged with him on the Badmington case. There was a thought in Nick's mind that Pratt might not have anything to do with the Badmington end of the matter; he might not have known either of the dead brothers—John or Rufus. It was possible that the error Nick had been led into regarding the box in the safety deposit vaults, might have been the direct result of the work of another person. Nick saw that there was a chance—and a reasonable one—that his failure was caused by the already sentenced crook, Pete Lorimer.

The detective decided to make some investigation regarding Pete, and after setting Chick Carter upon the trail of the shabby stranger who called himself Letterblair Pratt, he went himself to the city prison to ask some questions. He did not know but he might find some connection between Professor Pratt and the sentenced crook, Pete Lorimer. The so-called professor was possibly a pal of Pete's, and might not have been visiting the safety deposit institution nearly as long as Officer Simons believed.

Nick had entry to the prison, and was known to most of the officials, from the warden down. He had been to see Pete Lorimer after he was tried and before he had been removed to Sing Sing. He knew the officers who had charge of the part of the prison in which Pete had been confined, and the day officer of that tier was on duty at this time.

"See here, Ruben," said the detective, "who was in to see Pete Lorimer while he was here?"

"Why—not many folks, but yourself and Finowitz, his lawyer," replied the guard.

"None of his crooked friends?"

"No. I can say positively that there wasn't a gun here to see him. You wouldn't call Dummy Meagan a gun, would you?"

"Don't know him. Who is he, Ruben?"

"Why—I thought everybody knew Dummy Meagan."

"Here's one who doesn't," declared Nick promptly.

"Well, he's tongue-tied—speechless. Been so since he was a kid. Has the St. Vitus dance, too, I guess. Anyway, sometimes he jumps like a toad that's swallowed a live bumblebee—the spasm ketches him on the street, or any old place. And he can't do nothin' but make motions."

"Deaf and dumb?"

"You bet he ain't deaf. His tongue's paralyzed—that's all. I remember when he could talk as well as any feller in the gang. He and me both was brought up around the old Five Points, Mr. Carter."

"That's true, Ruben. So this Dummy Meagan came to see Pete?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"No."

"How did he come to visit him?"

"Oh, Pete lived near Dummy Meagan. I tell you the truth, Nick; the Dummy is all right himself, but he knows a lot of queer customers—just as you and I do. And I expect the crooks would rather trust the Dummy than most folks—he can't 'leak.'"

"So you think the Dummy might have done some errand for Pete?"

"Bless you, I don't know! Mebbe he came just out of friendliness to see Pete."

"Pete didn't send for him?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Did he write any letters?"

"Only to Finowitz. That I can swear to."

"And there wasn't anybody else came to see Pete saving this Dummy Meagan and the lawyer?"

"Barring yourself, no."

"Well, I know Finowitz, and I think he will consider it altogether best to answer straight any questions that I may ask him," remarked Nick; more to himself than to the prison officer. "Much obliged, Ruben. But the way, did Pete write many letters to the lawyer?"

"I dunno. He asked for paper and writing materials several times."

Nick went away with half a suspicion that there might be something to be learned about Pete Lorimer by pumping the lawyer he had engaged to defend him at the trial. Finowitz was one of that breed of cheap lawyers that infest every criminal court—especially those of Manhattan—and prey upon the criminals themselves. He would not have taken the case and worked so hard for Pete, had the accused not been able to pay him, and pay him well! Pete seemed to have called upon none of his crooked friends to help him when he was in trouble. Who paid Finowitz? Nick had a suspicion that Pete was hard up at the time of his arrest, and how could he have found the means of engaging Finowitz at all?

The lawyer in question had an office not far from the Tombs Court, and Nick made no bones of going into the place and demanding to see Finowitz in his private room. The lawyer was an unctious little man, with a highly polished bald head, short, carefully brushed "sideboards," very fat, red cheeks, and a nose that stood out so prominently on his face that, at first sight, it was the only feature one saw. But he had, beside, a narrow-lipped mouth, ungainly ears, two sleepy black eyes, and the sort of a smile that made any decent man want to kick its wearer! This was Emanuel Finowitz. Nick had met him before in the celebrated Spale case. Now the lawyer sprang up to do the honors of his office in much apparent delight at seeing the famous detective in it. But Nick saw that his little eyes shot fearsome glances at him, too.

"Misder Garter!" Finowitz exclaimed, bowing and rubbing his hands together. "You haf nod gome here

for noddings, I know—you vould nefer gall on poor me vidoudt an object. But I am honored!"

"I'll come right to business," said Nick, "and you had better answer the question I am going to ask you without hesitation."

"Vell! haf I said I vould nod, Mr. Garter?" asked Finowitz, with a disarming smile.

"You may," returned Nick, looking sternly at the fat little man. "You defended Pete Lorimer. Did Pete send any letters by you to friends outside?"

"Vy dond't you ask de vorden of de Tombs dot question, Misder Garter?" demanded Finowitz. "Even letters to a man's lawyer haf to go through de prison office. I can show you all the letters dot Pete wrote to *me*."

"I didn't ask you that question," returned Nick. "Your answer has betrayed you, Finowitz! You did act as go-between. You carried letters for Pete."

"I did nod! I did nod!"

"A letter, then?" decided Nick.

"No, Misder Garter! You maligh me. It would be unprofessional in the extreme. I vould nod do idt."

"But you sent Dummy Meagan to Pete when he asked you to!" exclaimed Nick. "And Dummy smuggled out a letter for Pete."

Finowitz looked at the detective, and a slow grin came over his face.

"You vas a smardt man, Misder Garter—I always said so," he observed.

"Where can one find Dummy Meagan?" asked Nick.

"I don't know, sir."

"Where did you find him when Pete said he wanted him?"

"You seem to know a good deal dod aind't so, Misder Garter," chuckled the lawyer.

"Now, Finowitz! Don't you try to hoodwink me. You came near being disbarred over that business of Bob Spale's—when he held up Mr. Alfred Meyer in his own house! Meyer only needs to be reminded of you, Finowitz, and he'll move your disbarment. Do you know it?"

The lawyer's face actually began to pale at this threat.

"Misder Garter! Misder Garter! I peg of you!" he cried. "Remember dot I got to make a livin' like other folks. Because I am a criminal lawyer——"

"Which you are, in more ways than one!" interrupted Nick.

"Vell, but somebody has to defend dese crooks."

"You don't have to be a crook yourself to give them a chance when they are nipped and brought into court," said Nick, in disgust. "Look at Mr. D'Ellery!"

"Oh! But Misder D'Ellery is a gread man," cried Finowtz.

"Well, tell me how you found this Dummy Meagan when Pete wanted him?"

"I send my clerk over to Sam Bowerly's saloon, on Mulberry Street, and told him dot Pete was in trouble, and to send Meagan to him in the Tombs. Dot is all, Misder Garter! I did nod efen see this Dummy Meagan."

"That's straight, is it?" asked Nick, with a threatening scowl at the shyster.

"Idt iss, sir! So hellup me!"

"All right," and the detective started for the door. But he turned and looked back, with his hand on the knob. "I'd like to get an honest answer out of you on another point, Finowitz," he said.

"Vell. Ask me, Misder Garter," said the lawyer, without showing any further emotion.

"Who paid you for defending Pete Lorimer?"

Without hesitation, Finowitz replied:

"I'll tell you dot if you want to know, Misder Garter."

"Well?"

"Pete paid me himself, sir. And little enough it vas—five hundred dollars," declared the lawyer, shaking his head mournfully.

"Five hundred dollars!" said Nick. "Why, it wasn't worth a fifth of that sum!"

"Id vas a hard gaze, Misder Garter. Undt you had secured de evidence. Id vas a vonder Pete didn't get eight, instead of two years."

"Five hundred dollars, eh?" repeated the detective. "And I don't believe Pete had five hundred cents of his own."

Finowitz let his face "slip" then. It broadened into a wide grin.

"Vell, Misder Garter, den he must have good friendts, undt dot is sure, for five hundred dollars was my price, undt five hundred dollars he paid me on de day he went up de river—undt he paid it cheerfully. Good day, Misder Garter! I am flattered—I am honored by dis visid—believe me!"

"The old fraud!" muttered Nick, as he went forth, much puzzled. "But I fancy he tells the truth in this particular. He acted as no go-between. Pete communicated with somebody he had a hold upon, by the aid of this Dummy Meagan. Now, can I find Dummy, and can I make him—well, not exactly talk; but can I make him give up any information that may be of use to me in this inquiry? By the way, it's getting rather interesting."

CHAPTER V.

DUMMY MEAGAN.

It was a simple matter to find Sam Bowerly's saloon on Mulberry Street—within a stone's throw of police headquarters and right across from the park that was made possible by the tearing down and removal of many old rookeries. Nick chanced to be unknown in the saloon which, at this hour of the day, was quiet enough. The usual type of red-faced, white-aproned young fellow presided behind the bar and asked the detective's business.

"I'd like to find a chap whom they call Dummy

Meagan—because he is speechless, I suppose. Can you tell me where he is?"

The barkeeper stared rather hard at Nick, as he slowly replied:

"Why, I tell you, 'bo, I couldn't tell you just this minute where Dummy is. Whachu want him for?"

"To give him a five-spot," said Nick promptly.

"Huh! That's good news—and it would be good to Dummy, I know. But what's your game?"

"You seem to be suspicious of me," said Nick quietly. "You're wrong. I don't intend Meagan any harm. And I really will give him five bones for doing me a small favor."

The barkeeper still stared at Nick curiously, and asked:

"For instance—heh?" and began to work his arm up and down as though he were manipulating an old-fashioned pump.

Nick laughed cheerfully. "I am not looking for any information that may injure any of Meagan's friends. This is about something that is past and gone. The gun in it is doing his bit now, and can neither be helped nor hindered by anything we can do."

"I thought you was a detective, 'bo. If I told the Dummy that he wouldn't have a thing to do with you."

"Then you do know where to find him?"

"I might make a guess," returned the other, squinting horribly at Nick. "But if there's a five-spot in it for him there ought to be something coming my way, too—what?"

Nick produced a crisp dollar bill and tossed it on the bar. "You can blow yourself to a shave, if you like. But find the Dummy quick—and don't do any monkeying with him."

"All right, 'bo. If you'll sit down at the table there—and have a drink—I think we can hunt up the Dummy for you."

When the fellow had served the drink—which Nick promptly emptied into the cuspidor—and had taken his tip out of the quarter the detective gave him, he opened a door behind the bar, and called to a woman in the rear region of the house:

"Min! I say, Min! Send Archie to find the Dummy, will yer? There's a guy here wants him."

Meagan, in ten minutes, came clattering into the saloon—a lank, ill-dressed, rather vacuous-looking creature, with a shock of yellow hair under a battered derby, pale-blue eyes, freckled complexion, and a half-open mouth that made him look almost idiotic. As he came into the place a spasm seemed suddenly to contort his body; he first stooped, or shrank together, and then shot into the air at his full height—and as he usually walked stooped at the shoulders and knees, this seemed gigantic—one foot left the ground entirely and kicked out jerkily, and his head was thrown violently back as he hiccoughed.

It was an unpleasant—not to say a startling—contortion.

"Gee!" ejaculated the barkeeper, "I'll never git used ter that feller jumpin' that way. He gives me heart disease. Here, Dummy, here's a mug says he wants ter give you five plunks. Ain't that a dream—heh?"

Meagan turned his vacuous face toward Nick, sitting at the table, and a grin widened his drooling mouth. But it rather bettered the general expression of the poor fellow's features.

"Does he understand the deaf-and-dumb alphabet?" asked Nick of the bartender, raising his hand.

"Naw!" said that functionary. "And don't you try to make motions to him, unless ye wanter git his goat. The kids around here have fooled him all his life about that biz, and he's sore. He never had no chancet ter learn it, anyway, and if you make a phony play at him with yer hands, he's likely ter reach out and swat you one."

"It is a shame that he should have been so neglected," muttered Nick, who could use two systems of finger language expertly. He had even insisted that Chick and Patsy learn that "silent language" used in the blind, deaf, and dumb schools. By its means, Nick, and either of his chief assistants, could stand hand in hand, and without an audible syllable, discuss important matters when necessary.

"He don't have no trouble tellin' what he wants," said the bartender carelessly. "Do you, Dummy? And yer know all about de coin, too—heh? How do the five bucks sound ter you?"

Meagan showed by his grin that he doubted the sincerity of the offer. Nick beckoned him over to the table.

"A friend of yours has got into trouble, Meagan," said the detective, in so low a voice that the drink server could not hear him. "I would like to have you go with me to some quiet spot where we will not attract attention, and perhaps you can give me some information about this fellow you know. Now, I don't want you to tell me anything that will hurt your friend; he's doing his bit already, and a man can't be punished twice for the same thing. And if you help me it will mean five dollars in your pocket."

Nick had watched Meagan's face the while he spoke. He had said all this very slowly, and, although in a low voice, distinctly. The dumb man had given Nick his full attention, and the detective had seen perception dawn slowly in the face of the unhappy creature. But suspicion was expressed there, too; indeed, Dummy Meagan probably was always suspicious because of his misfortune. He expected everybody he came in contact with to be trying to puzzle his poor wits and take advantage of his innocence.

"I am not fooling you," said Nick quietly. "See! Here is the five dollars. No! You cannot have it until I get the information that I want, and you can give. Will you come out with me?"

Meagan's eyes glistened, and he nodded. Nick rose and led him out of the barroom.

They went over into Mulberry Bend Park, and Nick selected an empty bench, and one that chanced to be

removed from any of the loungers in sight. Meagan was watching the detective all the time, and it was plain, by the look in his face, that the poor fellow's intelligence—such as he possessed—was keenly awakened.

"Meagan," said Nick, "this is about poor Pete Lorimer, who went up the river last week. He was a friend of yours."

The watery eyes of the dumb man changed in expression instantly, and he looked startled. He slid away toward the farther end of the bench, and it might be that he contemplated making "a getaway" without further discussion. But Nick hurried on:

"Now, I told you that what I want to know will not harm Pete, nor you. And I mean it. Pete has got his; you know that he can't be sent up twice for a thing?"

Meagan nodded slowly, but with some doubt expressed in his face.

"Now, Meagan, while Pete was in the Tombs he sent his lawyer to you, and you went to the jail to see Pete. Isn't that a fact?"

The fellow hesitated and tried to read Nick's face before making reply. The detective added:

"Come, come! You must trust me or we can never do business, Meagan. Surely you can answer a simple question like that, can't you?"

The dumb man nodded.

"You did visit Pete in the Tombs?"

Another nod.

"Now, Pete sent a message by you to somebody," said Nick, carefully studying the fellow's face while he "felt his way" with him. "He gave you a letter to deliver somewhere. Where was it? Who was the person Pete sent you to?"

Meagan had begun to look frightened again. He had one of his unpleasant paroxysms, and pretty nearly shook himself off the park bench. Nick laid a restraining hand upon his coat sleeve, and continued soothingly:

"Now, don't get excited—and don't be frightened. It was a small fault that you committed. Of course, Pete smuggled the letter to you without the officer's permission. In fact, he could not have obtained permission to send a letter out without having had it read first. But nobody will punish you for that, and Pete is already doing his bit. So where is the harm in answering me, Meagan? Did you take a letter from Pete?"

Meagan hesitated; but with Nick's unwavering gaze upon him he seemed unable to turn away his eyes. Finally he gave an unwilling nod of acquiescence.

"Whom did you take the letter to?"

Meagan looked puzzled for a moment, and his eyes wandered. Evidently he was somewhat at a loss to explain this point so that the detective could understand. But suddenly he opened his left hand, palm upward and flat, and appeared to write upon it with his right hand, held as one does when a pen or pencil is being used. Then he pointed over his shoulder in the direction of the frowning Tombs prison, and then, with his other hand, north and westward. Nick jumped to a shrewd conclusion at once.

"You read the address on the letter, and carried it from the Tombs, where Pete gave it to you, to the address—uptown, and on the West Side?"

Meagan nodded vigorously. His smile came back, and there was pride mixed with it, too, for it was not often that the dumb man found anybody who so quickly understood his method of sign talking.

"Can you read and write?" asked Nick.

Meagan nodded, and his smile grew broader. He drew out a soiled piece of paper and a stubby pencil. He licked the pencil point, and half lying down on the bench, produced, after several contortions, and a great deal of pencil licking and other effort, the following, printed in straggling characters, all "up hill and down" across the paper:

Nick saw that to try to have the man copy, from memory, the name and address on the letter that Pete gave him would be a momentous work. He asked:

"Can you read writing?"

Meagan shook his head, and pointed to the paper on which he had just put his pencil tracks.

"Well," said Nick thoughtfully, "will you take me to the place where you carried the letter—and point out the person to whom you delivered it?"

Meagan looked at him questioningly, and with the suspicion big in his countenance again. Nick let him take plenty of time to think it over, and waited for his decision. Nick chinked the money in his pocket, and the jingle of the coin seemed really to hasten the dumb man's appreciation of the point—and to influence his ultimate agreement, too. He finally nodded his head, and put out an eager palm—evidently for the money. Nick put half a dollar in it, and showed him the five-dollar bill again.

"You shall have this when you have done your honest best to help me," said the detective, with decision, "but not before. Show me the place to which you carried the letter, and the man, woman, or child to whom you delivered it, and the five dollars are yours."

Meagan stared at him for some moments, but finally his ugly face broke into another grin, and he rose up—rather, he jerked himself off the bench by one of his shocking spasms—and showed himself ready to attend Nick at once.

"Go ahead," said the detective eagerly. "It is some distance, I suppose?"

Meagan nodded.

"Above Union Square?"

The other nodded briskly.

"Farther than Madison Square?"

Again a quick nod.

"Forty-second street?"

A shake of the head this time, but a slow shake. Nick read the gesture aright.

"Near Forty-second, eh?"

Meagan nodded that it was.

"And on the West Side," said the detective. "Come; we'll take the subway and ride to Times Square. That should put us somewhere in the neighborhood of the address. Am I right?"

Meagan's smile and nod showed that the detective was correct, and Nick waited for no further questioning, but urged the dumb man out of the park and westerly toward the nearest subway station on Centre Street.

CHAPTER VI.

WHO WAS BURCHARD.

Nick and Dummy Meagan rode uptown in a local train and left the subway at the Times Building, where Seventh Avenue and Broadway come into conjunction and West Forty-second Street cuts across both. Meagan evidently knew the town very well. He was certainly out of place, however, in his shabby clothing, in the throng that filled the sidewalks in this vicinity. He led Nick down into Seventh Avenue, on the westerly side of that street, past several old-clo' shops, patronized by the out-of-luck actor who abounds in this neighborhood, so near the new Rialto, and finally turned into one of the Thirties.

These blocks, between Seventh and Eighth Avenues, are filled for the most part with old-fashioned flat houses and equally old fashioned residences, the latter almost entirely occupied as "theatrical boarding houses." Probably there is no spot in the civilized world boasting such a population of irresponsible, and happy-go-lucky folk as is to be found here. Moving vans and express wagons piled with heavy costume trunks rattle through these blocks, and are in other evidence, almost every hour in the day, and every day in the year. The population, to a great extent, is nomadic; yet there are flats and apartments here that have been occupied by the same people for twenty years and more. The more domestic theatrical folk, even if they have to bear that bitter experience known as "going on the road," keep their little flat, or their furnished room, from season to season. It is their only refuge in summer or during those other unfortunate seasons when they may be "resting."

Intermixed with these usually busy and honest folk is a small number of people of questionable, if not actually criminal character. Indeed, Nick knew that this thickly populated neighborhood, in which almost everybody is well dressed, harbored some of the sharpest and most dangerous crooks in New York.

Across Broadway, up and down Sixth Avenue, are notorious resorts which, at night, are infested with these criminals and their friends. From these places the people of the underworld, both men and women, emerge to prey on the unwary citizen, and to make trouble for the police.

So Nick Carter was not at all surprised when Dummy Meagan brought him into this block. It would not be beyond the bounds of probability to find living here in quiet retirement some well-known crook who had been associated in the past with Slippery Pete Lorimer, and one who either had reason to feel friendly toward Pete, or who was afraid of that second-story artist.

"And he must have been good and afraid of Pete if he put up five hundred dollars for Pete's defense," thought Nick, as he went along with the dumb man. "Surely Pete never had so much money laid away with a chum for such an emergency! I don't understand it—and I wonder who and what I am going to run up against. The puzzle is interesting."

Meagan made no show of being undecided where to go, or of forgetting the address to which he was leading the detective. He came at last to a flat house, nearer Eighth Avenue than Seventh, and turned unhesitatingly in at the door. On either hand were two rows of letter boxes with glass fronts, and narrow brass receptacles for the cards of the tenants.

Meagan glanced over his shoulder to see that Nick was close behind him. Then he faced the left-hand side of the narrow vestibule and reached out his hand to point to a card over the push button belonging to the front flat on that side, and on the third floor. The name clearly written on the card was "Burchard."

The dumb man nodded vigorously, pointed up to the number on the fanlight over the door, and again to the name indicating the occupant of the flat.

"That was the name on the letter Pete sent you with?" queried Nick.

Meagan nodded.

"Well, what did you do when you came here with the letter?"

Meagan reached instantly to push the button; but Nick seized his wrist and stopped him. The dumb man sprang one of his terrible contortions, and Nick was sorry he had startled him. Meagan looked at him sheepishly, and put out a tentative finger toward the button again.

"Wait!" commanded the detective. "Let me understand this. Did you come here in the daytime, or at night?"

Meagan looked puzzled, and Nick divided his question:

"Did you bring the letter as soon as Pete gave it to you?"

Meagan wagged his head slowly, but doubtfully, and looked as though he would have been glad to qualify the negative.

"You saw Pete in the afternoon?"

An affirmative nod.

"Late in the afternoon?"

Nod again, "Yes."

"Did you come directly up here after leaving the Tombs?"

Then the fellow wagged an emphatic "No."

"Did Pete warn you not to come direct from the Tombs?" was Nick's next question.

"Yes," nodded Meagan eagerly, the smile broadening on his face.

"Humph!" thought Nick. "That was an easy one!

Pete did not know but the Dummy might be watched. Then it is a safe bet that this Burchard, whoever he is, is a queer duck!" Audibly, he continued his questioning of the dumb man: "How long a time elapsed before you started for this address? An hour?"

A nod.

"More than an hour? Two?" queried the detective.

Another nod.

"Much longer than that?"

A negative shake.

"And so, it was evening, perhaps, before you got here?"

Meagan nodded that it was, his delighted smile broadening again.

"It was fully dark? Were the street lamps lighted?"

A nod, "Yes."

"The light was lit up here?" asked Nick, pointing to the gas lantern above their heads in the vestibule.

Meagan replied affirmatively.

"So you rang that bell, and—what happened?" asked the detective, watching the fellow closely.

Meagan was not at fault for a second. He turned and pointed to the closed door, and to the lock of that door.

"The latch clicked?" queried Nick.

The dumb man nodded confidently.

"Then I suppose you walked into the house? Yes? And went directly upstairs? Quite so! And you went up two flights—to the third floor?"

Vigorous nods answered these queries in the affirmative.

"Now, what I want to know is, who met you at the door of this flat? Who did you see?"

Meagan, at first only a moment, opened his palm again, and appeared to write upon it with his other hand, and then held the palm toward Nick, as though he expected the detective to read it. Nick guessed the meaning of this instantly.

"You mean that the person to whom the letter was addressed, met you?"

Meagan nodded again with fervor, grinning broadly at being so easily understood.

"It was a man, of course?"

Nod, "Yes."

"By Jove! Here's a hard one for you!" exclaimed Nick. "What sort of a looking man was he?"

Instantly poor Dummy Meagan began to show the appearance and manner of the person, Burchard. He tried to draw himself up very stiffly, he lifted his chin high—that weak chin on which several long, flaxen hairs grew, but no beard—and threw himself into an attitude which was probably meant to be impressive. But suddenly one of those St. Vitus spasms jerked him like a jumping-jack on a stick, and the effect of his imitation was completely spoiled.

"No, no, my boy!" exclaimed Nick kindly, "we'll never get at it that way. You were not intended by—beneficent Nature for a vaudeville entertainer and lightning-change artist. Just remain yourself. By the way, how did you know this man was Burchard?"

Meagan pointed to the card over the push button and looked inquiringly at Nick. The latter nodded, and Meagan undertook to answer his question by a series of rather elaborate signs. First he pointed in the direction of downtown, looking at Nick to see if he followed him, and then held his wrists close together and shook his head. Nick studied him half a minute, and then realized that Meagan was holding his wrists as he would be obliged to do if they were coupled by manacles. Instantly this suggested a prisoner, and Pete Lorimer must be the prisoner in question.

"Pete?" exclaimed Nick.

Meagan nodded delighted, and at once pointed to himself, striking his chest with his index finger and nodding.

"Yourself—yes!" returned the detective.

Then the Dummy turned and pointed again to the card with the name "Burchard" written upon it, and pointed likewise to the interior of the house.

"Burchard—I see!" cried Nick, with a smile. "Pete told you at the prison how Burchard looked? Is that it?"

"Yes," vigorously nodded Meagan.

"And he gave you so clear a description of the man that you could not mistake him?"

Again a reassuring nod.

"Did you see anybody else at this flat?"

Meagan shook his head quickly.

"See any signs of any other occupant? A woman, for instance?"

"No," returned the dumb man as plainly as he could signify the negative.

"Well," the detective said, after a little thought, "you might as well punch the button, and we'll see if he is there. When you see the same man, you pinch me. But don't make any mistake. We want to be sure to find Burchard himself."

But the door latch did not click when the signal button was pushed. They waited for some further moments, pushing the button occasionally, and finally Nick was about to try some other householder's button, for the sake of having the door opened and obtaining entrance to the hall, when a man came up out of the basement with a broom, mop, and pail in his hands and entered the vestibule.

"Vot you vant—heh?" he asked. "You vant to look at a flat?"

Nick turned at once to pump this janitor.

"You have some empty apartments here?" he asked.

"Yah! I haf two now, alretty. I vas going up to clean von, yet."

He reached out as he spoke and coolly picked the card on which was written the name "Burchard" from the slot under the letter box, and threw it away. The detective picked it up.

"I haf dot flat empty," he said. "Third floor, front. You look at it—yah?"

Meagan's face was a study. Nick controlled his own features, and said calmly:

"We will take a squint at it, anyway."

The janitor opened the door, picked up his paraphernalia, and led the way upstairs. Meagan was evidently very desirous of communicating something to Nick, but the latter put out his hand and motioned him to wait. In a minute they were at the door of the empty flat, and the janitor unlocked it and asked them in.

Nick looked at Meagan and the Dummy nodded. This was evidently the very apartment to which he had brought Pete's letter. When the detective stepped into the place he expressed surprise, saying:

"Why, the man's furniture is still here!"

"It vos a furnished flat, yet," said the stolid Dutchman. "You can haf id unfurnished for t'irty dollars, or mit de furniture for forty-five."

"The last tenant left his furniture, then?" queried Nick quickly.

"De agent tell me dot de furniture vas left on his handts a long time ago. He always lets de flat furnished—and anudder upstairs on de fift' floor. But he vill dake out de furniture if he gets a good tenant vot vants to pring his own."

"How long have these rooms been unoccupied?"

"About a veek, I believe."

"Don't you know?" asked Nick.

"I only took de chop as chanitor yesterday. De older chanitor vent avay. His vife died in de hospital, undt he dakes de baby home by Chermany yet."

"Then you never saw the man who occupied these rooms last?" said Nick.

The janitor stared at him wonderingly, and shook his head.

"No. I dond't seed him," he said.

"And where is the old janitor now?"

"Huh? Dond't I dell you he iss gone py Chermany? He iss on de ocean yet!" cried the man. "But dis iss a goot flat. You chust look at idt."

"I will," said Nick quickly, and he walked through the rooms.

There was a small, dark kitchen, with a bathroom out of it, two bedrooms, the front one being an alcove addition to the parlor. The furnishings were commonplace, and the whole was dusty. There was not, however, a scrap of paper about. The scrap basket beside the little desk in the front room was as clean as a whistle; the desk itself was empty. The detective's quick, sharp glances about the place revealed nothing on a second examination. He even opened some of the bureau drawers, as though carelessly. They were empty.

"You have been cleaning up here already, I see?" questioned the detective.

"Naw. I vas only come up to-do idt," said the German stolidly.

"Then the other janitor cleaned here."

"Naw. He didt noddings for two veeks. Dot iss vy he was leaved. I haf all dot mugging dis to clean—yet."

"Who is the agent of the property?" asked Nick.

"You can pay de rent to me," said the janitor. "I can gif you a receipt yet."

"I'll pay a deposit on the flat," said Nick, producing a banknote; but I am not decided whether to take it furnished, or to bring my own furniture. I will see the agent. Who is he?"

"Mr. MacCallam, around on Eighth Avenue."

"I'll see him," Nick said, and motioned Meagan to come with him.

The latter was evidently much disappointed. Nick could not doubt his honesty in the matter. He had certainly brought Pete's letter here to one, Burchard; but Burchard had disappeared.

The detective found MacCallam, the real estate man, easily enough. He left Meagan outside while he went in to inquire about the last occupant of the flat. He met the agent himself, and held considerable conversation with him. It seemed that Mr. MacCallam had had little trouble over that house, and the janitor had usually collected the rents and brought them in, some few of the older tenants bringing their own.

Burchard? He remembered there had been such a tenant. Never saw him. The old janitor, now gone away, had let a furnished flat to Burchard, who always paid promptly, and to the janitor, and MacCallam had never seen the man.

"How long had Burchard occupied that flat?" asked the detective.

MacCallam referred to his books, and said that Burchard had occupied the flat for more than a year. He had no idea who the man was, what he did, whether he had a family, or not.

"I never bothered my head about him. I never do when a man pays his rent regularly and makes no kick. There are enough trouble makers in every house to preclue our bothering about those people who attend their own business and pay promptly," declared the philosophical Mr. MacCallam.

Nick then explained who he was, and what he wanted of the flat on which he had paid the janitor a deposit of five dollars. "I want to search that flat for some clue to Burchard's identity. I will have time to do this within the next twenty-four hours," explained the detective.

The agent agreed to let the deposit stand in lieu of rental for that length of time, and gave Nick a line to the janitor to that effect. But when the detective came out of the real estate man's office he had no hope at all of easily, or quickly, tracing the man to whom Pete Lorimer had sent the letter by the hand of Dummy Meagan.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

Nick went back to the old house, with the Dutchman carrying his tools. The janitor was evidently deeply interested in the strange affair, and several times he

tried to make some communication to the detective, but Nick was too busy just then to give his full attention to the dumb man, and so lost the meaning of his signs. First of all he showed the janitor the receipt he had obtained from the agent, and asked him to let the flat remain just as it was, to show nobody into it, and to do no cleaning up until he, Nick, had had a chance thoroughly to search the premises.

Having shut the grumbling janitor out of the rooms, the detective then had some questions to put to Meagan, and he told him so.

"This matter has become a very serious inquiry now, Meagan," he said. "Remember that I am not trying to hurt Pete, who is your friend; but I want to know if this fellow to whom you delivered the letter, this Burchard, is your friend, too?"

Dummy Meagan shook his head vigorously.

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No," signaled Meagan.

"Positive of that, are you? Well, did you ever hear of him before Pete gave you the letter to bring up here to him?"

Again an emphatic shake.

"Is he a crook?" demanded Nick.

Meagan looked puzzled, but slowly shook a negative.

"You mean that you have no evidence, other than his connection with Pete, to suggest that the man, Burchard, is a crook?"

Meagan returned a nod of assurance to this question.

"You never saw him before that occasion—the occasion which you delivered to him Pete's letter?"

"No," signaled the Dummy.

"Have you seen him since that time?"

Another vigorous shake of Meagan's head.

"When you met him—on that single occasion, did he seem surprised to get the letter? Did he show any surprise, or anger, or did he appear to be glad to get Pete's letter?"

Meagan shook his head slowly.

"Did he say anything to you?" asked Nick.

The other shook his head.

"Did he give you anything to take back to Pete? Any reply to the letter?"

"No," replied the dumb man, by a sign.

"Did you just hand him the letter and turn right away?" asked Nick.

"No," declared Meagan, by means of an emphatic shake.

"Had Pete told you to wait for an answer?"

Nod. "Yes."

"So you waited for it?"

Another nod.

"But it was not forthcoming? And he said nothing to you? Did he open the letter in your presence?" Meagan signified that Burchard did so.

"And you waited in the door of the flat?"

Again an emphatic nod.

"And then what—when he had read the letter? He said nothing, you tell me. Did he say nothing at all to you?"

The dumb man waved his hand and went through the motions of shutting a door.

"He waved you away and shut the door?" queried Nick.

A vigorous nod.

"And did you return to Pete?"

"No," signaled Meagan.

"Did you see Pete again in the jail?"

"No," was again the reply.

"So you do not know whether Burchard answered Pete's letter, or not?" murmured Nick, and again Meagan signified a negative. "Yet I am sure that Pete was expecting the reply in the course of the day. Nor did a letter come for Pete to the prison, from this Burchard—or from anybody else. The officer would have told me. That confounded Emanuel Finowitz knows more than he was willing to tell me. I bet that, if Burchard supplied the money of Pete's defense, Burchard had some communication with Finowitz. Now, will it pay to put the screws on that shyster lawyer?"

Nick knew that the Dummy had done his best, and was only too anxious to earn the five dollars promised him; but it was beyond the ignorant and unfortunate man's power to do more than he had done.

"Meagan, I believe you have been honest with me," said the detective kindly. "You have not done all that I required when we made our bargain. You have not shown me the man that you delivered Pete's letter to. But it is not your fault. You have done your little best, Meagan, and I am going to pay you for the will, not the deed," and he handed the eager and delighted fellow a crisp five-dollar bill.

"Now, you can't help me any further. If you could give a clear description of the man it would be a help. No, no! Don't try!" exclaimed Nick, recalling by another convulsive attempt of the victim of St. Vitus' dance to display his imitative abilities.

"You've done your best, and I make you a present of that five willingly," continued Nick, smiling at the poor fellow. "But I'd give a hundred if you could point Burchard out to me!" exclaimed the detective. "Here, Meagan, take this—my card. There is my address on it. If you ever come across this Burchard, follow him, find out where he lives, and what he does—nail him so that I can get at him—and then come and tell me. If the information is of any use to me then I'll give you a hundred dollars!"

The dumb man's eyes grew round and his jaw expanded to enormous proportions. His excitement broke another service convulsion, out of which he came with the same broad grin fixed on his face. He nodded vigorously, shook Nick's hand warmly, and bowed out of the door, obviously determined to earn at once another such fee. The poor fellow Carter so much desired to meet.

As Nick went over the circumstances leading up to

the present emergency, the puzzle of the safety deposit box seemed greater than ever. He had begun seriously to doubt if the paper Pete had given him was really what Rufus Badmingtan had searched room 313 for. John Badmington had occupied that room. Under the carpet he had hidden a memorandum for his brother, telling where the chemical formulas stolen from Milton J. Hyburn were deposited for safe-keeping. It was the most reasonable thing in the world to believe that the precious document, for which Hyburn had killed John Badmington, was in some safety deposit box. Therefore, the paper Pete had given the detective, was accepted by him at its face value, and Nick had never entertained the least suspicion that he was being fooled until, with the two lawyers, he had gone to open box 1812.

If Pete Lorimer had substituted this paper Nick now possessed for the real memorandum found in Rufus Badmington's hand, why had he done it? Pete had believed the head of the firm of chemists was searching room 313 for some valuable—something convertible easily into cash. Would the memorandum made by John Badmington have strengthened Pete's belief, and would the foxy thief, scared as he was over the awful death of Rufus Badmington, have had the courage to write this paper that Nick now held, and substitute it for the real memorandum made by John Badmington?

If this was a fact, then Professor Letterblair Pratt was "let out." Chick was off on a wild-goose chase in searching for the professor and finding out who he was and whether he had any business to open box 1812 at the Liberator vaults. The professor had acted so strangely, however, that Nick could not help feeling suspicious—to a degree, at least—of the shabby man in black.

There was a way to prove or disprove this idea of substitution of the memorandum, and Nick was sorry that he had not taken up that before coming uptown with Dummy Meagan. At the offices of Badmington & Badmington there must be some specimens of John Badmington's handwriting. Nick knew who was in command at the offices of the firm now that Rufus was dead; he had understood that there were still plenty of Badmingtons to carry on the business, and that a nephew of Rufus and John—a somewhat younger man named Perry B. Badmington—was now the controlling spirit of the great business.

Nick could not go to this gentleman and explain why he wished to compare the writing of the murdered John Badmington with the memorandum he held of the safety deposit box. He did not know just what manner of man Perry Badmington was. If he was anything like his Uncle Rufus, Nick was very sure that—if he had any inkling of the value of the hidden formulas—he would be as hot to gain possession of them as Rufus had been!

But Nick decided that, as soon as he was finished in his investigations in this flat house where the mysterious man, Burchard, had lived, he would go to the Badmington & Badmington offices and try and get a sample of John Badmington's handwriting.

If Pete Lorimer had substituted a fake memorandum for the real one, the sharp little thief must have seen his way clearly to turning the real memorandum to account. And Nick's thought was that, by the aid of that memorandum, or what it contained, or what it promised, Pete had interested the mysterious Burchard to come to his help.

Both Pete and Burchard might have thought the memorandum referred to the hiding place of real cash, or something that could be turned into real cash. Nick wondered if it was so, and Burchard had obtained the chemical formulas which—Hyburn had told him—were partly in cipher, what he could possibly do with them!

No matter how much time Nick wasted in mental discussion of the situation, deduction could not play any prominent part in the translating of this tangled problem. There were the two leads—Professor Pratt and Burchard; Chick was following one, and Nick could only, at present, follow the other, and blindly!

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK YIELDS TO IMPULSE.

Before he instituted any thorough search of the furnished flat that the man, Burchard, had occupied, Nick made a canvass of the other tenants of the house. Some of the people met him with courtesy, others were suspicious, and a few ugly because of his questioning. Nick was used to handling all manner of people in his inquiries, however, and whether they met him pleasantly, or not, he managed to wring out of them such answers as served his purpose. And as far as he could discover, not a soul in the house knew really what Mr. Burchard looked like! This might have increased Nick's suspicion of the man of mystery in another neighborhood.

But these people were not folk who rose at six in the morning, had their breakfasts at a regular hour, and departed for business, which engaged them until supper time, when they returned again at a regular hour, and so rounded out their day's existence in a clocklike manner. No, indeed! Some of the folk in this house seldom rose before noon. Their homecoming might be anywhere from midnight till dawn. Afternoon was morning for them, and, if Burchard had been at all regular in his habits, they could easily have escaped seeing him at all!

Before Nick took up the other matter that interested him in this flat house in the Tenderloin, he went out and called up the offices of Badmington & Badmington, and asked to speak with Mr. Perry B. Badmington. Although Nick had been engaged by Mr. Rufus Badmington, while that gentleman was alive, to find the lodging occupied by his murdered brother, John, and had done this for the then head of the great

chemical firm, the detective had had no dealings with the Badmingtons since the death of Rufus in room 313 of the Decan House.

And this is easily explained. Nick had agreed to find the lodging, so that Rufus could search for the memorandum left by his brother relating to the hiding place of the valuable formulas the Badmingtons had stolen from Milton J. Hyburn. This agreement Nick had fulfilled; but he had been paid a thousand dollars for his trouble, in advance. He had frankly intimated to the great Badmington that he did not consider him honest, and naturally Rufus had resented the detective's plain speaking.

What manner of man this nephew was, Nick did not know. He understood that Perry Badmington was under forty, and was the son of a sister of Rufus and John. The man this sister had married had legally taken the name of Badmington when he married into the family. In fact, the husbands of the three Badmington girls had all done this, and by the express request of Mr. Rufus Badmington. Rufus Badmington had never married, and John was a periodical dipsomaniac, and was cut off from the family, to a degree, anyway.

Now Nick was trying over the phone a scheme that he had hatched to enable him to obtain a sight of some of John Badmington's handwriting. He [illegible] "fall" for his game.

When he got Perry B. Badmington on the wire, Nick said:

"You may perhaps have heard of my connection with the apprehension of the murderer of your Uncle John, and my work for your Uncle Rufus, Mr. Badmington. I am Nick Carter, the detective. I am still interested in the case against Milton J. Hyburn. There has arisen a matter on which we need some added light. Can you get me a specimen, or more than one, of your Uncle John's handwriting?"

"What are these specimens for, Mr. Carter?" asked Mr. Badmington, showing the caution which was a marked characteristic of his Uncle Rufus at least.

"I am not at all sure that they may not finally appear as evidence in the trial of Hyburn," admitted Nick frankly.

"I don't understand. Why should you require my uncle's handwriting to convict his murderer?"

"Not exactly for that purpose. But naturally the district attorney will demand the strongest possible evidence——"

"Is this request from the district attorney?" interposed Perry Badmington.

"No. Not at present. But I am preparing certain evidence in the case, and at present the request is solely my own," said Nick.

"I cannot really understand the necessity for such a request, Mr. Carter," declared Badmington. "Neither can I have any objection to your seeing such specimens. I can obtain them easily, I suppose."

"Can I have them this evening, then?" asked the detective. "Will you send them to my house?"

"I should prefer to see you personally," said Perry Badmington, after a moment's hesitation. "Can you make it convenient to call on me?"

"Certainly. I shall be glad to meet you," said Nick. "You will find me at the late home of my uncle, Mr. Rufus Badmington, on Riverside Drive. At any time after eight, if you will be so kind," concluded the gentleman, and rang off.

Nick considered this arrangement eminently satisfactory. He had some curiosity regarding Perry Badmington. He had much more curiosity about John Badmington, a [illegible] and he hoped that the present head of Badmington & Badmington would not suspect that fact.

Several hours would elapse before he could call at the residence on Riverside Drive. Nick went back to the flat once occupied by Burchard, and set in to search the rooms thoroughly for some trace which might reveal the identity of the mysterious man.

He opened bureau and pantry drawers, almost took the desk to pieces, dug into the cracks of the wardrobe with his clasp-knife blade, turned up every rug, moved the furniture that chanced to stand against the wall, removed everything from the two beds, felt upon the dusty tops of all door frames, [illegible] under the mantels, [illegible] a chair or [illegible] in the closet, looked behind all that array of china in the dining room, turned the teapot and sugar bowl upside down, and shook the dust out of the parlor vases.

Nor was there any place that Nick Carter did not look into, and examine, and probe, within the next two hours; and he turned up——? Exactly nothing!

"And I wonder," thought Nick, as he prepared to leave the empty flat, "if his going away from here, and his removing every trace of himself from the premises, was intentional on the part of Mr. Burchard? Did he expect to be looked up—and by *me*, for instance?"

Nick had phoned Joseph, his confidential servant, that he would not be home for dinner, but learned that, although Chick was absent, Patsy, another assistant, and his wife, Adelina, were at home. The detective took time for a bite of dinner at a Columbus Circle restaurant and then jumped aboard a boulevard car and rode out to the crosstown street nearest the Badmington residence. He did not reach the house until a few minutes past eight o'clock.

The stiff and starched footman ushered Nick into the library, where, after a short wait, Perry B. Badmington joined the detective. Mr. Badmington was not a young-looking man if one looked at him closely. He was brisk of movement, rather nervous, dressed in the height of fashion, and his eyes were somewhat glassy in appearance.

Those eyes made Nick [illegible]. They were not the optics of a normal man, and not, [illegible] his nervousness, [illegible] Perry Badmington was [illegible] Nick as being a dipsomaniac. There was merely some-

thing out of the ordinary about him—something unpleasant—and the detective did not know whether it was something physical, or something mental. As for his moral nature—well, Nick could not help having his suspicions because of the characters of both of his uncles.

"You are Mr. Carter?" asked the gentleman brusquely.

Nick handed him his card.

"Thank you. Your request may have been perfectly ordinary to you, sir; but I do not understand yet why you wish to see my Uncle John's writing?"

"The object of the district attorney, of course, will be to connect the assassin and John Badmington as closely as possible. Your Uncle Rufus talked about this connection with me," said Nick, truthfully enough, for he had once made Rufus Badmington admit that there was such a connection, "and had not so sudden a misfortune overtaken Mr. Rufus, he would have been approached, of course, on this same topic. I hope you have found some specimens of Mr. John's writing, sir."

"Oh, I have found them," said the other, rather grumpily, it seemed. He reached into an inner pocket and returned his hand to sight with three or four scraps of paper in it. One by one he handed these over for Nick's perusal. "These are cut out of letters to my Uncle Rufus," he explained. "Naturally, I could not allow you to see the letters themselves; they were of a private nature. You can have them for what they are worth to you. I do not know where else to find anything Uncle John wrote. I was not at all familiar with him. He—he was rather out of the family, you know."

"So I understood," said Nick, taking the slips in his own hands.

He saw they were phrases only—sometimes a full sentence, but not always; as, for instance:

"Pretty well know what can be done by a man who knows."

"I am asking you only for what is right. Don't be absurd and."

"This isn't much, and the returns are never equal."

"Since which time I have hoped to see you again."

"It won't do any good to."

The first thing, of course, that Nick studied, was the style of the handwriting. He was quite sure that the same person who had written the memorandum he had obtained from Pete Lorimer had penned these words on the slips Perry Badmington had produced.

Next, Nick was sure that the slips had not all been clipped from the same letter. All the paper was common enough writing paper, and lined, but there were at least three different kinds—even different colors.

Nick did not wish to produce the memorandum supposedly found under the carpet of room 313, in the Deccan House, and compare the writing thereon with these slips. So he said:

"May I keep these, Mr. Badmington?"

"Why—I presume you may."

"There's just another thing that would help me very much in this inquiry," said the detective, taking up his hat preparatory to leaving.

"And what is that?"

"It is absolutely necessary that I should have John Badmington's signature. Of course, as he worked about the offices more or less, that should be an easy thing for you to produce."

"No. It is not. These letters were not signed with my Uncle John's full name, even. And I do not believe I could find anything around the office written by him, but these letters."

"But he did some clerical work there, did he not? I mean when he chanced to be at the offices?"

"He was never allowed to sign his name to a paper for Badmington & Badmington," said Perry Badmington sternly, and there spoke Rufus, the Pompous, again! Nick looked at him and marveled that nephew and uncle should be so nearly alike in some points of character.

"How about John Badmington's private papers?" asked the detective.

"Uncle Rufus destroyed them all when Uncle John was killed and the murder came to light," said Perry. "I know that to be a fact. Uncle Rufus went to the place where Uncle John had left his possessions when he disappeared on his last debauch, and he burned everything John owned. Uncle Rufus always feared that poor Uncle John would manage to disgrace the family. And he did come near it," sighed the speaker.

"You consider it so, eh?" said Nick thoughtfully. "Well, Mr. Badmington, I tell you what it is! I have really got to have something with John Badmington's name signed to it. Look around. Seek among old family papers. Ask the other members of your family for some letter from John. It is really important."

"You surprise me, Mr. Carter," said the other, evidently displeased that the detective should be so insistent.

"Well, I am telling you the truth. I want the man's signature. I'll take these few specimens, too; but the signature is what I am after."

"I don't know how——"

"Why, it seems very strange," broke in Nick, "that somebody should not have something or other signed by your Uncle John. Really, it would almost seem suspicious under other circumstances," declared Nick, eying Perry Badmington closely. "You look, sir. I am sure you will find it. And don't fail to communicate with me the minute you get the important signature."

With these words Nick bowed and walked out of the room. His speech seemed to have troubled Mr. Badmington a great deal.

And Nick intended it should. He had laid stress on something that, ten minutes before had not entered his mind. He had done something on impulse.

And he did something else on impulse as soon as he was clear of the house. He hurried to the nearest public telephone. He called up his own house and ordered Patsy Garvan, the best "shadower" on his staff, to meet him as soon as possible in front of the Badmington house, to which spot he returned himself and took up a close watch of the premises.

CHAPTER IX.

RUNNING DOWN THE CLUES.

Patsy came in course of time.

"Chief," he said, "by the tone of your voice over the phone, there is plainly 'something doing.' Eh?"

"I am not altogether sure whether you will find it anything doing, or not," returned Nick. "You may find yourself left high and dry here on this bleak avenue for the rest of the night. If it happens to be so, I will see that somebody relieves you early in the morning. But if Mr. Perry Badmington should venture forth at any time to-night, I want you to follow him, and not to lose him," and he proceeded to give Patsy a detailed description of the present head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington.

He related to Patsy, too, sufficient of the details of affairs as they had occurred this day to make the young man see and appreciate the present situation regarding the business of the missing chemical formulas.

"I'm on," said Patsy, "and you leave it to me, chief. I won't let him get away from me."

With this assurance, Nick left his smart young assistant to "keep tabs" on Badmington and the Riverside Drive residence, while he, himself, returned to the downtown section of the city. In the subway train he examined the slips of paper given him by Perry Badmington again, and compared them with the paper Pete Lorimer had given him—the memorandum purporting to instruct Rufus Badmington to find the formulas deposited in box 1812 of the Liberator vaults.

It could not be gainsaid that the writings were wonderfully similar. Nick could see no reason to doubt that the same hand had penned both, and all!

Yet his suspicions had been roused by the manner of Mr. Badmington. So he had demanded the signature of John Badmington, and that demand had plainly troubled the dead man's nephew. Why? Ah! Nick could not even guess that, but he was casting for clues, and might expect one to rise to almost any bait!

He was likewise casting for a clue when he went downtown now and made his appearance at the Deccan House, where he was very well remembered by the manager, who greeted him with:

"My goodness, Mr. Carter! I hope there is nothing wrong about here now."

"You consider me a bird of ill omen, do you?" chuckled the detective. "I can assure you I am on a very simple matter."

"What is it, sir? Of course, you understand that I will gladly assist you in any way in my power——"

"But you hope I'll get it over with and leave you in peace, eh?" returned Nick. "Well, I will. I want to look at your register as far back as the time John Badmington last came to your house."

"We knew him as John Minturn, you know," said the manager.

"Quite true. But I want to see his signature."

"I—I am afraid, Mr. Carter, that I cannot show it to you," said the manager hesitatingly.

"How is that?"

"Mr. Minturn—Mr. Badmington, I mean—was so well known here that he was not asked to sign the book."

"But he must have signed it sometime," said Nick, rather vexed.

"Of course, he signed it the first time he came. And that was some years ago. And he may have continued to sign it on several subsequent occasions. But of late years he would come in with his bag, we all knew him, we always gave him room three hundred and thirteen, or one like it, and he went upstairs without writing his name."

"But the old registers——"

"It was not two months ago that I made a bonfire of most of them—all, in fact, more than three years old. And I am perfectly sure that Mr. Minturn's name was not signed in any of these remaining books."

"If you say so, sir," said Nick gravely, "I can have no doubt of it. But I am really sorry. I would like to have seen how John Badmington wrote 'John Minturn.'"

So this cast failed.

But there was another. Finowitz!

Nick had a grave suspicion that Pete Lorimer had written the memorandum relating to the safety deposit box. Naturally, from that had grown the suspicion in the detective's mind that Mr. Perry Badmington had given him samples of Pete's handwriting. Of course, it followed, this being the case, that Nick believed the mysterious man, Burchard, was a go-between from Pete to Badmington.

There was little evidence to support this, but much suspicion. Pete must have found in the real memorandum that Mr. Rufus Badmington had obtained before he had died in room 313, of the Deccan House, that which he knew would deeply interest whoever was at the head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington. Nick did not consider at the time that there had been any real acquaintanceship between Pete and Perry Badmington, the nephew of the two dead men.

But Burchard, Pete's friend, had certainly been able to use the information Pete had for sale, to get out of Badmington the price of Pete's defense in court. That was plain. Finowitz declared he had received five hundred dollars for his work on the case, and

Finowitz would not have been happy had this not been true.

Finowitz had specimens of Pete's handwriting. He admitted it. He had told Nick, when the detective called on him that afternoon, that Pete had written him from the Tombs. Nick wanted to compare those letters with the specimens of handwriting that had just been given him as having been penned by John Badmington!

A reference to the directory told him the place of abode of the Polish lawyer, in Rivington Street, and Nick went across town and found the address. The lawyer was evidently used to having his clients consult him at his home, as well as in his office, for there was an ornate gilt sign under the window of his flat on the first floor, and the parlor of the apartment looked more like an office.

When Emanuel Finowitz saw Nick Carter his round, fat face expressed such a mixture of emotions that the detective did not know whether he was frightened, or was going to burst into uproarious laughter.

"What's the matter with you, Finowitz?" demanded Nick, grumpily enough. "Do you see anything funny-looking about me?"

"No, Misder Garter! I vould not laugh. Ven you come to me—and to mine house, too!—id iss no laughing matter—nein?"

"Well, I'm not sure that it bodes much ill for you. I just want something of you."

"Vot iss idt?" was the cautious question.

"You told me to-day that you had letters from Pete Lorimer while he was in the Tombs?"

Finowitz nodded, pursing his lips.

"Give me one of them, Mr. Finowitz," said Nick.

"My! my!" cried the lawyer. "I could nod do dat! idt vould be unbrofessional."

"Oh, hang!" ejaculated Nick, in disgust. "Let me see one of them, then. That is all I ask."

"Misder Garter, I could nod do dot—no, not even let you see von."

"Now, see here, Finowitz!" said Nick. "Don't you tempt me too far. I don't care anything about your professional conscience. You've got no other—I'm dead sure of that! You show me one of Pete's letters, and make no bones about it!"

"I assure you, Misder Garter, I vould do dit, if I could," declared the evidently troubled lawyer.

"Well, what's the matter?" demanded Nick suspiciously.

"I hafen't got them."

"What?"

"Id iss so, Misder Garter—so hellup me! You can dake me to de sheep butcher, undt I could dell you no more trut'. I hafen't got them."

"Not Pete's letters?"

"No, sir. Not one of them."

"But you had them this afternoon?"

"I had them ven you honored me by galling at my office, Misder Garter," admitted the little lawyer meekly.

"And where are they now?" asked Nick, scowling at him as he stood in the middle of the frumpy parlor.

"Burned," said Finowitz, nodding seriously.

"Burned?" cried Nick, starting.

"Yes, sir; burned."

"Explain that statement, Finowitz! As I told you to-day, I am in no mood to be lenient with you. How came you to burn those letters? Do you usually burn your client's letters? And why should you have done so in this case to-day?"

"I thought id vould be best, Misder Garter," declared the little lawyer, but showing plain symptoms of alarm.

"Come, now! There is something behind all this talk, Finowitz," declared Nick Carter shrewdly. "Tell me the truth—and all of the truth! Why did you burn those letters?"

"Vell, sir, von reason vas because you had been to see me about Pete. Dot's right. I did nod know but you vould be back asking this very t'ing, Misder Garter."

But he did not say this with that degree of assurance that convinced Nick. The detective took a stride toward the little lawyer and shook his finger before his red face.

"Tell me the exact truth, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "You got a tip to burn them—you know you did!"

"I—I——"

"Admit it!" cried Nick. "Don't prevaricate."

"I—I—well, yes, I was advised," admitted Finowitz.

"Who advised you?" snapped the detective.

"I do not know."

"What's that?" again burst out Nick, in anger. "You don't know?"

"I do not know, Misder Garter," repeated Finowitz solemnly.

"What do you mean by such a ridiculous statement?"

"I vill dell you, sir. This afternoon I vas called up on de telephone undt I vas asked did I had dem letters. I said, yes, I did. Undt de voice said——"

"What voice?"

"The voice over the telephone."

"You mean to tell me you did not recognize it?"

"Truly, I did nod, Misder Garter."

"Well! What did this wonderful voice say?" demanded Nick scornfully.

"Id told me to destroy the letters—to save myself trouble. Undt, on thinking id over, Misder Garter, I thought id vas very good advice—undt I followed idt!"

"You burned them?"

"I burned them, sir."

"And just because some unknown person told you to?"

"No. Because de person told me to, and because you had been to see me. I do not vant to be mixed up in any trouble mit you, Misder Carter. I had a

right to destroy the letters. They were mine. I done id. Dot iss all."

Nick knew it was so. And he was more than half convinced that the entire story the lawyer told was exactly true! But he asked one more question:

"Finowitz, at what time did you get that telephone message that led you to burn up Pete's letters?"

"About five-thirty," declared the lawyer promptly.

"And did you have no idea who the person was who spoke to you?"

"I did nod. But if I did, Misder Carter, professional etiked——"

"Oh, hang your professional etiquette!" ejaculated Nick. "It's enough if you did not know, or suspect, who the person was."

"I dell you honest, I did nod," said Finowitz.

Nick walked out of the place without another word. But he had got one big fact in his mind: The unknown person had called up Finowitz and advised him to burn the letters, *after* Nick had telephoned to Perry Badmington asking him for a specimen of John Badmington's handwriting.

CHAPTER X.

PATSY ON THE TRAIL.

Patsy Garvan had not long to cool his heels upon the Riverside Drive after Nick left him on guard before the Badmington house, when the front door opened and somebody hurriedly descended the steps. Patsy knew at once that it was not one of the serving men, for the footman himself stood at the door and stared curiously after the individual who left in such a hurry.

This was a man of medium height, who wore a silk hat and was evidently in evening dress under the long coat he wore. Patsy did not have to guess very shrewdly to make him out to be Mr. Perry B. Badmington. The gentleman had sent for no vehicle, yet he seemed to be in a hurry. He darted around the corner into the side street and walked as fast as he could toward the subway.

Patsy was far enough behind him, and on the other side of the street, to be unnoticed; but he did not propose that Mr. Badmington should get any train that he didn't catch, too!

This was easily accomplished, for the man had to wait for a train after he got into the station. He paced one end of the platform nervously, while Patsy watched him covertly from the other end. The young assistant of Nick Carter had a good opportunity to scrutinize Perry Badmington. He was nervous in his movements, but he seemed to have no vigor. When he stood for a moment he seemed to totter on his feet. Patsy, too, noticed the glassy stare of the man's eye, and muttered to himself:

"The guy looks like he was doped. I wonder what kind of a bug he has. There is something wrong with him, sure."

But unless one looked closely at the present head of the firm of Badmington & Badmington, it never would be noticed that there was something so much awry with him! Patsy rode downtown behind him in the train, and saw nobody favor Badmington with a second glance. He was so quiet and unobtrusive that he did not attract attention.

They left the Times Square station at about the hour when this portion of Broadway is at its liveliest. The sidewalks were crowded and the street well filled with automobiles and cars. The crowd was well dressed and apparently happy. Mr. Badmington began to weave his way through the throng like a ghost. He certainly had no part, or lot, with these people—he was a looker-on. He never looked behind him, but he seemed to covertly stare at every man he met, and frequently he halted and loitered before display windows, or in doorways, eying each man who passed with an intentness that proved conclusively to Patsy that he was on the watch for one particular person—and perhaps one whom he was not altogether sure he would know!

Patsy effaced himself as much as possible. He never once passed Badmington, or came within short range of his vision. He saw that the man was scrutinizing everybody, and Patsy did not wish to be examined and catalogued. But he never lost sight of the man, and he manœuvred so as to see his face most of the time, too.

Time and time the man stopped and seemed to wait expectantly for somebody whom he knew to come along the crowded walk. They were an hour traveling from Forty-second Street to Thirty-fourth, and in all that time Badmington seemed not to see a soul he knew.

But just as he came slowly past the big department store near the corner of Thirty-fourth Street, Patsy happened to see something that quite amused and, later, much interested him. A roughly dressed fellow—rather an odd-looking individual, in fact, was coming north along the outer edge of the walk. He, too, seemed much interested in the people he passed. He really stared at them oftener than he looked to see where his own feet were being planted.

He was not begging, and Patsy did not recognize him as a yegg, or cheap crook. His face was occasionally nervously contorted, and, just as he came opposite Badmington, with Patsy behind the latter in the crowd, the roughly dressed man jumped, uttered a violent hiccough, and went into the air like a bucking broncho! But he missed his footing when he came down, and sprawled off the curbing into the gutter.

Everybody in the vicinity laughed—saving Badmington. That individual moved on, intent upon his apparent search, and without giving a fleeting glance at the fellow who had come such a cropper.

Patsy followed on across Thirty-fourth Street, and so down Broadway, Badmington was moving slowly, but

often stopping in some backwater or eddy of the human throng, evidently painfully watching for a face he wanted. Patsy kept as far from Badmington as he dared, fearing to attract his close attention and raise suspicion in the man's mind.

About Thirtieth Street Nick Carter's young assistant found that the strangely acting and roughly dressed character whose accident had drawn his previous attention was slouching along the curb again, but this time coming down the street. He went stolidly by Patsy, but the latter saw him almost stop beside Badmington and favor him with a prolonged stare. The latter, oddly enough, did not seem to notice the stranger. It was evidently not a person of this fellow's appearance whom Badmington wanted to find.

Badmington went on as far as the Hoffman House. He even went into the bar there and looked about, lingering a few minutes. Patsy stood where he could glance in at the swinging door now and then, and saw that Badmington did not speak to a soul.

But suddenly the young fellow saw that the strangely acting man was hanging about, too. He stood where he could look in at the barroom door and see Badmington. When the latter came out, Patsy waited curiously and beheld the roughly dressed fellow begin to trail the rich man; but he did not accost him or seem to draw his attention in the least.

Patsy was puzzled. It could not be that the stranger had picked out Badmington as a victim from whom to collect leg or steal. No; he was watching him, but seemed neither desirous of speaking with him, nor of attracting his attention.

It was an odd situation. Perry B. Badmington was evidently searching anxiously for somebody in the throng; this stranger was watching Badmington with the intentness of a cat at a rat hole; and Patsy was trailing them both and wondering how the combination was likely to work out!

Back they strolled to Thirty-fourth Street. Just before Badmington crossed the street-car tracks at this point a man swinging comfortably along from the west, and on the sidewalk ahead, seemed to catch Badmington's eye. He hastened his steps. A car passed between him and Patsy, and when the latter got to the farther walk all he saw was Badmington and this other man diving down the steps into Murray's.

"By thunder! he's found his man—and I didn't get a squint at him!" exclaimed Patsy, under his breath.

He was much put out for the moment. Then he determined not to lose the couple so easily. Of course, they would order a drink down in the rathskellar, and they must be some few minutes at the table, anyway.

Patsy darted into a covered way near by, which chanced at the moment to be free of cars. He drew from his pocket a black bow of silk cord which was made in the shape of an extra-heavy boot sole, and about three inches high. This he fitted upon the sole of his right shoe, and stamped it firmly into place. He wore it as one does who suffers the deformity of a short leg.

He pulled off his tie and snapped a ready-made white one into place; he unbuttoned the two top buttons of his vest, turned it back, and displayed a dazzling expanse of shirt bosom, with two studs visible. His suit was a black one, and all he had to do was to reach up into the lining of the back of his coat and unfasten and draw down the tails. When he whipped off his light coat and slung it over his arm, and pulled down his linen cuffs into view, Patsy was quite able to pass into any dining room that demanded its male patrons should wear dinner dress, at least. His hat did not match, but was a black felt, and would not be noticed.

The transformed detective limped back to the entrance to the café and descended without hesitation. In the uncertain light of the ornate place he was at fault for a moment or two as to where Badmington and his companion were sitting. But when he spotted them he manœuvred so as to sit where he could at least watch the play of their features while they talked, even though he could not hear a word they said.

And the conversation was an earnest one. Badmington seemed to be very anxious to interest, or propitiate, the other fellow; and that was the surprising part of it. For in this companion of the head of the rich chemical firm, Patsy easily recognized a man whose police record should have precluded his ever being recognized by Badmington.

"Gee! that fellow is in bad somehow," thought Patsy, "if he takes up with Larry Miggs. What will Nick say to this?"

Miggs was rather a well-dressed man, though flashy as to paste jewelry, puff tie, extremely yellow gloves, and so forth. He owned a shifty eye, a bristling yellow mustache, thin, sleek-looking light hair, and a pair of beautifully manicured hands, on which he wore several cheap rings, like a shopgirl, and of which he was evidently inordinately proud.

Patsy was prepared to remain in the restaurant as long as the man in whom he was interested; but fortunately their conclave did not last long. He saw that Badmington did not touch the drink he had ordered; it was plainly not intoxicants that gave him that glassy eye and strange, nervous manner.

When Patsy saw that the two were about ready to separate, he paid his own check and hopped out of the place. He was careful not to put on his bow as he was out of the range of Badmington's vision—if that gentleman should have been at all interested in his appearance.

Once out in the street, Patsy caught the dislodged spot again, saw that he was alone, and immediately dragged the bow off his foot. He slipped on his coat over it, but stood up to his usual height, and favored the two halves of a way-back-when-black-pepper-box place. This change in his appearance precluded any recognition by Badmington.

When the latter came out of the café—and he came

out alone—Patsy was right beside him and boarded the same surface car on Broadway that the rich man did. Patsy observed that Badmington was careful to select a car which was bound for the One Hundred and Thirtieth Street ferry; it would go near the house in which he now resided as his Uncle Rufus' heir.

Patsy left the car at the Columbus Circle and dove into the subway. He risked the chance that Badmington might not go directly home; but he escaped being spotted as a shadow by this manœuvre, too.

He arrived at the Riverside Drive residence some time before Badmington appeared. The head of the firm of chemists came swiftly around the corner, ran up the steps, and let himself into the house in a flash. Patsy, from a secure hiding place, watched this in surprise. Badmington acted just as though he feared he was being followed.

And while Patsy waited in security it was proved that Badmington had been folowed. Around the corner darted a figure that Patsy, with a start, immediately recognized. It was the shabby man who had made such an exhibition of himself on Broadway, and had seemed to trail Badmington for a while.

This fellow was evidently much put out when he came out upon the drive and saw not a soul in sight. His prey had escaped. Not a sign of Badmington was there on the street, and the door of the fine residence into which he had darted, had closed softly. There were several houses into which Badmington might have run, and the shabby man evidently did not know which hid his prey.

He hiccoughed, and threw one of his fantastic spasms in his excitement, and Patsy came near laughing aloud. For, although the man's misfortune was pitiful, in itself it was a most amusing exhibition.

The man paced up and down the walk for some minutes, but finally gave the thing up. He stared hard at the street number lettered on the lantern at the corner, and then shuffled off through the side street. Patsy, after a little, followed his example. He decided that Badmington would not come out again that night, and that he had sufficient of importance to tell Nick Carter.

And he was right. Perry Badmington had no intention of leaving the security of his dead uncle's house again until morning. When he had entered so excitedly, the footman, wide awake, stood stiffly at attention in the hall.

"Go to bed, James!" commanded Perry Badmington.

"Yes, sir. Can I do anything else for you, sir?"

"No; go to bed," repeated Badmington.

He flung aside his coat and hat, and went directly into the library. The footman heard the key turned in the lock, and shook his head. He tiptoed to the door, and listened. No sound from the room. There was another door to the library, [illegible] drawing-room. [illegible] were hung on both sides of the door. When the footman had put the master's coat straight, and hung up his hat, and lowered the hall lights, he crept around into the drawing-room.

The two halves of the door did not quite meet, and the footman knew this of old. He crept between the curtains and put his eye to the crack. The curtains on the other side "chanced" to be parted a few inches.

There was only a single light burning in the library—the drop light on the table, beside which Mr. Badmington sat. Green shaded as it was, it flung but a narrow circle of light about the gentleman, and that extremely subdued.

The footman saw he was manipulating several small objects on the table. His coat sleeve was turned back, and the shirt sleeve over it. Mr. Badmington was busily engaged in what he was doing.

Then, suddenly, something clattered on the table. Badmington sank back in his comfortable chair. He reached up and snapped out the light, and the room was instantly in darkness.

There followed a long sigh from the man in the library. The footman could see nothing more. He heard his master nestling for a moment in the chair as though to increase the comfort of his position. Then began the long, even, heavy breathing of a body wrapped suddenly in unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIGNATURE WANTED.

"Is the chief up yet?" demanded Patsy of Joseph, Nick Carter's confidential serving man, at an unconsciously early hour in the morning. Patsy himself had not disturbed Adelina on his late home-coming, but had bunked down on a couch in one of the lower rooms, and was just now going, touseled of hair and with eyes swollen from lack of sleep, to his bath.

"You will find him in the office in ten minutes, Mr. Patsy," said Joseph.

"All right. I'll take a spray and see if I can get my wits together," said the young man—and he seemed to have accomplished this when he joined Nick, for he was his usual rosy, cheerful, rather slangy self.

"Great pippins, chief!" he exclaimed, "I always seem to get the dirty end of the stick! Been chasing around half the night, while you were tucked into your little bed all safe and sound, and Chick——"

"I grant you that I have been abed," interposed Nick, smiling. "But I haven't seen or heard from Chickering since I sent him forth to dig up all he could about Professor Letterblair Pratt; and, although I know that Chick can usually take care of himself without any assistance from us, and I fancy that Pratt may not be at all connected with this mystery [illegible], I confess I am beginning to be a bit worried about Chick."

"I'll take a look for him as soon as I have reported,"

said Patsy quickly. "But listen to my little tale of woe, now, chief."

"I surely will. I presume you had good reason for coming home without waiting for somebody to relieve you at the Badmington house?"

"The best reason in the world. Badmington went out, came downtown, did a particular errand, and returned. He was safe for the night—and he's not likely to be an early riser, eh?"

"I suppose you are right there," admitted Nick. "Well, let's have the details."

Patsy told his story in a very few words, relating his trip downtown behind Badmington, the evident expectation, or hope, of the rich man to find some person he needed to see, his picking up Larry Miggs with evident satisfaction, their conference in Murray's, and Badmington's subsequent return to the house on Riverside Drive.

"And what he wanted of that mug, Miggs—well, you know what *he* is, Nick?" said Patsy.

"Get his card, Patsy," said the chief, who was taking notes. "I don't just place him in my mind."

A part of Nick's immense card catalogue of notable—and notorious—people was devoted to accredited crooks—making a library of criminal information that any municipal police bureau would have been glad to possess. In many cases Nick had obtained photographs and Bertillion measurements to attach to the brief biography of the criminal in question.

Now Patsy found in the drawer labeled "MI" a card and photo of Larry Miggs. Nick nodded when he saw the picture, and then picked up the card, saying:

"I remember that gun. And here's his history, eh?

"'Miggs, "Larry," or Lawrence, rl. moniker; alias L. M. Bender, Larry Martin, etc. About thirty-two years, in nineteen-five, when sentenced to last bit at Albany for forgery. Served two terms in State, and one in Illinois—Joliet—for similar work. A marvelous penman. Sometimes follows shows, or fairs, as street penman. Can imitate engraved script perfectly. . . . Well, educated; Western seminary and college; tried medicine; has played Ind. doctor game, Too lazy to work; dope!'

"You wrote this yourself, Patsy," said Nick, smiling. "I suppose you got all the facts?"

"All the main facts—yes. I know the guy very well," declared young Garvan. "If you remember, Nick, we had something to do with putting him away that time in nineteen-five. He didn't get a great deal, anyway, for the forgery didn't amount to much. It was the Miliken bond case, and there were bigger guns than Larry in it. He hasn't been out long, although he must have got all the time there was for good behavior. He always is an exceptional good prisoner."

"Yes? And what's this 'dope'?"

"Blowing his burners. It's bound to finish him some day. He uses the tar powders in any form he can get them, I understand. But it's a puzzle to me to know how he ever got friendly with that Badmington."

"Yes, that is a puzzle. Unless——" Nick did not finish this comment, but suddenly looked up from the photograph that he had been studying again. "This fellow is too tall, and his description doesn't at all fit the meagre one I got of that mysterious Burchard. Miggs can't be Burchard."

"I suppose not. And we still lack the link between Badmington and Pete Lorimer, eh?"

"Right you are," admitted Nick.

"By the way," said Patsy suddenly, "there was another guy interested in Badmington last night."

"Beside Miggs?"

"Badmington went after Miggs," said Patsy, laughing. "Beside me, I mean."

"Shadowing Badmington?" cried Nick, in surprise.

"Sure."

"Who was it?"

"You got me. I didn't have any time to look him up. A rough-looking character. Didn't seem to be a beggar; might have been a yegg. And, although I thought he'd dropped the chase when Badmington ran into Miggs, the rough chap appeared at the Badmington house just after the gent had gone in for the night."

"And what then?"

"The guy appeared disappointed. He didn't know where Badmington had gone. He seemed to take a hard squint at the street number, so as to remember it, and then beat it before I did."

"Another complication in the business," sighed Nick. "This is not a simple problem by any manner of means, Patsy. Keep your eye open for this unknown and find out who he is and what he wants, if possible."

"All right, chief!"

Nick was silent for a few minutes and Patsy anxiously asked:

"What do you think Badmington is hobnobbing with such fellows as Miggs for?"

"And he has relations with Pete Lorimer, too. The head of a great firm like Badmington & Badmington! I bet Uncle Rufus did not know of it while he was alive. He would have put the boot to Nephew Perry as he did to Brother John. There's something dead wrong in that family, Patsy. One of them a dipsomaniac—another I positively believe was a thief at heart—this Perry B. an associate of crooks."

"It looks funny," said Patsy.

"I have no idea, of course," ruminated Nick, "how Badmington came to know this Miggs; but I believe I can smell a decayed rodent in the present circumstance, Patsy."

"And what is it, chief?"

"He wanted Miggs. He wanted to use him. He bargained for Miggs' help last night in the café."

"And what is Miggs to do?" queried Patsy wonderingly.

"I'll give you something to chew over, my boy," said Nick, with a laugh, and rising to answer Joseph's call to breakfast. "It is this: I feel in my bones that, before the day is over, Mr. Perry Badmington will supply me with his Uncle John's signature, my request for which evidently disturbed him so much on yesterday!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE TROUBLE WITH PROFESSOR PRATT.

In connection with the brief biography of the crook known as Larry Miggs was a memorandum of his usual haunts and associates while in New York. Unless a criminal knows himself to be "wanted" by the police, he is seldom averse to appearing in public. A professional crook never feels himself disgraced by the acts he has committed. If he has been successful, and has money, he wants to go where he is known, and associate with those who may appreciate his worth as a "high-toned gun."

After phoning police headquarters, and calling up a detective he knew, at the West Side Branch of the Detective Bureau in West Fiftieth Street, Nick "got a line" on Miggs, and, after making some changes in his personal appearance, went over to a place on Sixth Avenue where is was believed Miggs could be found. Nick entered this place in the character of a shabby, but cleanly dressed man who looked to be a cross between an actor and a shell-game artist in a Coney Island side show.

Nick bought a drink at the bar, which he slyly slid into the cuspidor, looked the crowd of loungers over, and then drifted into the back room. Miggs was there, and the detective knew him at once, but he did not appear to look at him, and really dropped down with his back to the table where the penmanship expert sat with a couple of friends.

Nick tipped the waiter, and soon got into a chat with him.

"I tell you what I want," said Nick, in course of conversation. "I want a chap who can do a little letter writing and card writing for me. I've got a scheme that pays well, but I can't sling ink like it ought to be done. Say, I'd give a sawbuck right now for a chap who could write a few cards for me and keep his mouth shut about it afterward."

"Say, bo!" declared the waiter, in a whisper, "maybe you've come to the right shop for them goods. I know a guy that's a Jim-dandy when it comes to writing."

"Yes, eh?" asked Nick, with some eagerness.

"Another life! But he's tender, I believe, on the booze! I think he done his bit for bein' too handy with a pen. So they tell me, anyway."

"Say, is this fine a chap to make a connection? I keep quite some, if you understand."

"Who is he chap?"

"I'll tell him you want him to have a drink with you. Is that right? You can put it to him yourself. I'll introduce him."

By and by Miggs' friends went out, and in a minute the waiter brought the forger over to Nick's table.

"This is Mr—er—Lawrence," said the waiter, winking and pushing Larry down into a seat before the detective. "Ahem! what'll youse have, gents?"

Larry Miggs had evidently had several drinks already. Perhaps that was what made him less cautious than he ordinarily would have been. He shook hands with Nick and ordered "the same."

"The kid says you got something in my line, mister?" said Miggs bluntly.

"I don't know. It ain't much. Mebbe you are too high class for me?" suggested the detective.

"Oh, I got all the class there is, all right, all right!" declared Miggs boastfully; "but that ain't sayin' I can't do a favor for a good feller. You don't want nothin' very big, I s'pose?"

"It won't get you into any trouble with the bulls, that's sure," declared Nick, "and I can stand ten dollars for it."

"What's the game?"

"That I ain't telling you. But I'll tell you what there is to do, and you can see if you want to touch it."

"Sure! Ten dollars is good chicken feed. Besides, I made a handy little bit already to-day—and without running any chances, either. This is my busy season, I reckon. What do you want?"

"Half a dozen cards written—that's all. I've got the cards in my pocket. Only one word on them. And then forget you ever did it," and Nick winked with a wealth of slyness.

"I reckon you're one of them nifty boys, all right, all right!" returned Miggs. "Show me. And if it looks as straight as you say it, I'll take the ten, and thank you kindly!"

"Can you get pen and ink off the waiter?"

"Sure," said Miggs, and he did so.

They were in a retired corner, and there was nobody to see or overhear them. When the boy brought the ink and pen Nick produced several white cards, and Miggs arranged them before him.

"What's the word?" he asked, coolly dipping his pen.

"Let's see—can you write a regular steel-plate hand?"

"I can give you a script that you'll swear was taken from the stone!" declared Miggs proudly, and he dashed a word across one of the cards with really wonderful ease—and it looked like the finest kind of engraving.

"Good!" ejaculated Nick, bending forward a little. "Let's see you copy *that* word on a card," and he suddenly laid down in front of the penman the soiled card that the janitor of the Tenderloin flat house had removed from the door there that day. The single word, "Pratt," was carefully written in the same hand as that from which the pension letter had been obtained, and Larry Miggs in the face.

Nick saw the fellow start and his face began to pale slowly. He evidently fought for self-control, and he stole a sly look at the detective. The latter did not try to appear unconscious. His steely gaze met the frightened eyes of the ex-convict, and suddenly his hand shot out and seized Miggs' wrist, too.

"There is another name you might try your hand on," Nick whispered. "You've had practice this morning, too, I venture to guess. Try 'John Badmington'! No, you don't! Try to get away from me and I'll handcuff you and call the cops in. Keep your mouth shut and go out with me, and I will make it easier for you, Miggs. But I am going to put you in hock for a few hours at least; I'll see that you don't send out any wireless messages of warning, either! Come on!"

The ex-convict, both abashed and frightened, did as he was told. They got out of the place by the side door and without a soul guessing that one was an officer and another a prisoner.

Nick took his man to the nearest station, filed a complaint, warned the man in charge to let nobody see the prisoner until he, Nick, gave them permission, and then the latter hurried home to remove his present disguise. When he arrived, Joseph, in great excitement, gave him the following message sent to the house an hour before by Chick:

"DEAR NICK: Come over to the West Side Court and bail me out. You'll need five hundred in cash. You are Major Barber, and I am Neal van Todd. I have put my foot in it—and deep, too. It is to laugh—only Professor Pratt is doing the cacchination act. You certainly handed me a hot one this time."

Carter knew that his chief assistant must consider the matter serious, and likewise that Chick had no intention of revealing his true identity to either the magistrate or the police. The desire for release on bail, however, was plain in Chick's cry for help, and Nick dressed himself with military precision, carried a cane, stuck a pair of closely cropped gray "sideboards" on his face, sported a single-barreled eyeglass, and sailed over to the West Side Court in a taxicab.

He put on a great deal of dignity—Patsy would have called it "chest"—when he asked for his friend, "Mr. Neal van Todd."

"I understand that he has got into some difficulty with the police," said Nick pompously, "and I have come to see about it. It is all a mistake, of course——"

The doorman stooped from his gigantic height and put his lips close to the ear of the disguised Nick, laying a hand tenderly on his shoulder and patting it the while.

"Lemme tell you what it is, ould boy," said the uniformed one. "This is no time or place for discussin' that same wit' his 'annar. His 'annar is sore on the business already. No use in makin' it worse. His 'annar is death on tin-badgers, an' he believes yer friend—Van Toad, or whativer other sort of a Dutch name it is he bears—was playin' the detictive whin he got inter Profissor Pratt's house. These tin-badgers that try ter git ividince for min an' wimen foolish enough ter want divorce, has no mercy showed thim by his 'annar."

"My goodness, officer!" gasped Nick. "Tell me what to do, then? Van Todd——"

"They haven't ate yer frind yit," said the policeman hoarsely. "All you gotter do is ter walk down there ter the clerk's desk like a little man and plank down five hundred beans—and it's the best bet thin that Van Toad kin jump if he likes! Do as I tell you, man! Don't attrac' his 'annar's attintion to the case again."

Stifling his amusement, Nick meekly accepted the well-meant advice, went to the clerk of the court, and made arrangement for the bail of his assistant.

"And that five hundred is half the fee we took from Mr. Rufus Badmington for discovering his dead brother's lodgings. We are not making money on this case. Unless things take a turn, and we find and restore the secret formulas to Hyburn, and his lawyer disposes of them for a large sum of money, Nick Carter & Co. are likely to come out of the small end of the financial horn!" he whispered to himself, with a grim smile.

Nick waited outside in the cab until Chick appeared. That young man displayed disgust upon his usually handsome features.

"Let us hear the worst, my boy," said Nick, as Chick climbed into the cab. "What are the harrowing details?"

"Nick, it is too bad you did not take up the shadowing of Letterblair Pratt yourself," declared Chickering bitterly. "It is no joke. Seems to me I always get such jobs handed out to me. And—well, laugh! look at me! Where do you suppose I spent the night?"

"I couldn't guess," declared Nick, unable to restrain his amusement, for Chick was certainly a badly mussed up individual.

"Locked in Professor Letterblair Pratt's coal cellar!" declared Chick hotly, and that was the beginning of his "tale of woe." It lost a good deal in the telling until long afterward, when Chick could look back upon the adventure with amusement as well as equanimity. At the present telling it was too tragic to be enjoyable.

It seemed that Professor Pratt was one of those scholarly men who possess heads full of knowledge and without an atom of real "horse sense." He had been married in his youth, had been waited upon by his first wife hand and foot, and scarcely knew whether he possessed a domestic companion until, suddenly, one day she died.

Very soon the professor's household went wrong indeed. His servants robbed him, the tradesmen cheated. The house was dirty, nothing was in its place, the professor's books and papers and experimental tools were displaced, and the poor man was very miserable.

He chanced to be very rich as well as very learned. He was considered a "good catch" by match-making mammas. One day, after she had been diplomatically thrust in his way several times without his even noticing her—for the professor was very nearsighted, and absent-minded as well—he happened to see a very beautiful young woman who was in the matrimonial market. She had been well trained by her mother for the occasion. She caught and held the professor's interest as no other woman had since he was a young man, and before he had allowed books to drive everything else out of his head!

He even made a memorandum that he was to call on this young lady. She had invited him and had been smart enough to suggest that he make the memorandum. He called. He was caught in the web. And one day he awoke to find himself married again.

But the household wasn't run much better than before, and the poor professor soon found himself in a worse state than when he was a widower. He had married a fashionable butterfly, whereas his first wife had been a domestic treasure. He awoke to the discovery that he had never half appreciated the first Mrs. Pratt, at least. He mentioned this fact. He unwisely compared the domestic qualities of No. 1 with the lack of them in No. 2.

It was the deluge! If Professor Pratt had been in trouble before, he was in deeper now. The present Mrs. Professor at once declared she was jealous of the dead and gone sharer of her husband's joys and sorrows. And she likewise declared that she believed the professor was interested in ladies who were not—to say the least—"dead ones"!

She would not leave his house, but she began suit for divorce—and alimony! She otherwise made the professor's life one of misery. He could not go out without being shadowed. Wherever he was his wife's detectives stuck to him like the Old Man of the Sea to Sindbab the Sailor. And into this state of affairs Chick Carter had blindly plunged.

He had looked up the professor's residence, had gone there on some trumped-up story of wishing to consult him, had been led into a trap by the professor and his butler, who was faithful to him, and found himself shut up for overnight in the coal bin as a tin-badger trying to get evidence for the wife in her forthcoming suit for divorce.

Chick was mad—disgusted—chagrined. Nick realized it was no time for unrestrained mirth.

"And the professor has no more to do with the secret formulas than the Goddess of Liberty!" concluded Chick. "That box at the Liberator vaults belongs to him."

"I guess you are right, Chick," admitted Nick. "I had come to the conclusion already that neither of the Badmingtons had anything to do with box eighteen-twelve. The missing formulas are not in it. But I'd like to know what it is the professor keeps in that box that he thinks is so very precious?"

"Do you really want to know?" demanded Chick, and for the first time his face slipped, and a slow smile dawned upon it.

"I do," admitted Nick.

"Well, I got it from what I overheard between the butler and the professor himself. He's got in that box some old love letters, written by his first wife and himself, to each other, before they were married. And he keeps them locked up down there where the second Mrs. Pratt cannot get hold of them. Wow! Now are you satisfied, Nick?"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LIVE WIRE.

"A gentleman has telephoned you, Mr. Carter, that if you call at his house this evening, he will have for you the signature that you so much desired."

This was Joseph's greeting as Nick Carter and Chickering entered the detective's home just before luncheon. Nick nodded, and said:

"The name was Badmington, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Badmington was the name."

"Freshen up, Chick, have your lunch, and join me in the study," said Nick. "I have a good deal to tell you, and we have some preparations to make for this evening. I am not sure, of course, for there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, but we may get to the explanation of the Badmington affair this evening, at least. Whether we can end the matter so shortly remains to be proved. There is a missing link. We have not yet discovered the connection between Badmington and Pete Lorimer, the hotel thief now serving his term up the river. The principal query of the whole affair still remains: Who is Burchard?"

He wasn't Miggs, although Nick was confident that the forger had written that card that had been tucked over the push button belonging to the flat which Burchard had occupied in the Thirties.

The detective was likewise confident—and had the corroborative evidence of some statements that Miggs had dropped—that the penman had supplied for Perry Badmington the signature of John Badmington to fit the writing which the present head of the Badmington concern had given Nick the previous night, purporting to be penned by his Uncle John.

Those slips of paper Nick was confident had been clipped from letters written by Pete Lorimer. To whom he had written them was still a question; but it might be to Perry Badmington himself!

Knowing that the memorandum Pete had given Nick, relating to box 1812 of the Liberator vaults, would be compared by Nick with specimens of John Badmington's handwriting, Perry had supplied specimens of Pete's chiography, instead of his Uncle John's. He could not get at Pete now to have him write the words "John Badmington" in his own hand; but Badmington knew Miggs, knew what he could do, and had hired him to forge his Uncle John's signature.

It was a crooked trail Nick had followed to this

conclusion; but it was plain enough now. Professor Letterblair Pratt had been entirely eliminated by Chick. Pete had perhaps written 1812 when he faked the memorandum, quite by chance. Wherever the document rightfully belonging to Milton J. Hyburn was really hidden, it certainly was not in that safety deposit box!

If, through Burchard, Perry Badmington had given up five hundred dollars for the defense of Pete Lorimer, it was reasonable to suppose that the new head of the firm of chemists got something in return. Rufus Badmington had once assured Nick that only himself and his brother John knew anything about the value of the missing document containing the formulas invented by Milton J. Hyburn's father.

It was easy to believe that, when Perry Badmington stepped into his uncle's shoes, he knew nothing about this paper. But the memorandum Pete had secured at the moment of his sudden death in room 313 of the Deccan House must have plainly told Pete Lorimer, who had seized the paper from the dead man's hand, that a great treasure was hidden, and that Perry Badmington would pay well to know about it.

As Badmington had known Larry Miggs, the forger, he might also have been acquainted with Pete Lorimer, the hotel thief! The name Badmington in the memorandum might have set Pete upon the scheme of helping himself through Perry, whom he knew.

How did Perry Badmington come to be familiar with these crooks? Nick could make a shrewd guess, although he had little evidence as yet to support it. Some habits, or tastes, like politics, make strange bedfellows!

At least, out of this tangle of ideas, and suspicions, Nick evolved one very serious intention. He decided that he needed Dummy Meagan. The Dummy knew something that Nick wanted to know. The poor fellow seemed to be unable to impart that knowledge to the detective; but in some way—by some means—Dummy Meagan must be made to serve Nick's purpose.

Patsy was spending the day on the trail of Perry Badmington. He had followed him downtown, was noting everything he did outside his offices, and everybody he spoke to. Chick needed rest, so Nick went down to Mulberry Street to find the dumb man himself.

But to his great disappointment he could not get a trace of the dumb man's present whereabouts, even when he offered money for the information!

"I tell you honest, 'bo," declared the barkeeper who had before found Dummy Meagan for Nick, "that if, I knowed where he was I'd tell you. But say! since you come over here and took the Dummy away, he ain't been the same. He's got some kind of a bug in him, and can't stay around these diggin's at all. I dunno what's come over the poor mug."

Finding the search for Dummy useless, Nick planned to keep a close watch on Badmington himself. He communicated with Patsy and agreed to be at the station of the subway with the car and Danny, at the hour when Mr. Badmington would be likely to emerge on his way to his late uncle's residence. Patsy was to trail him uptown, and there Danny would take his place, and Garvan would be relieved for the night.

"If Badmington is in the habit of consorting with crooks, he will meet some other like acquaintances yet. Pete, of course, will not tell us anything, and Miggs refuses to squeal. He knows we have nothing on him at present, and he can refuse to talk. But there may be some other gun who would be glad to talk about Badmington—and Burchard!"

This was Nick's conclusion when he drove with Danny to the uptown subway station early that evening. He had figured the time pretty well, and they had not long to wait when Perry Badmington emerged from the subway, with Patsy in a new disguise close at his heels. Nick beckoned Patsy, and the latter jumped into the tonneau of the car, while Danny started it slowly through the street behind Mr. Badmington.

"Look there!" exclaimed Patsy, in a low voice, seizing Nick's arm.

He pointed at a figure across the street—a figure that seemed to have risen into view through the sidewalk, so unexpected was its appearance. The figure was dogging Badmington's footsteps, too.

"That's the guy I was telling you about, Nick," said Patsy eagerly. "He's the fellow that trailed Badmington on Broadway last night, followed him uptown here, and lost him. How about his being a good fellow to get acquainted with, eh?"

As he spoke the roughly dressed character crossed across the street on the trail of the burly walking Badmington. Just ahead of the automobile the man likewise halted. "Have a fit," Patsy protested it.

"Geel did you ever see the like of that, chief?" cried young Garvan.

"I have, indeed. That fellow is an important figure in this case at the present moment. I have all my present hopes on him," cried Nick. "It is Dummy Meagan."

"Not the dumb man who knew Burchard?"

"The same."

"But what's he following Badmington for?"

"That is the question," returned Nick, with emphasis. "We must find that out. There is a mystery here—look out, Danny! That wire seems to be down."

Nick called out to his chauffeur just before the car reached the corner of Riverside Drive. The electric lamps were not lighted, however, and as the corner was a repair wagon, and a gang of men were at work.

Suddenly the end of a dangling wire had been flung halfway across the street. Perry Badmington was beyond it; but Dummy Meagan was approaching the end of the wire, which seemed innocent enough.

Nick was cautious, however, and had warned Danny to stop. The chauffeur did so. Several of the repair gang came running across the drive, and one shouted a warning.

Meagan, however, intent only on keeping Badmington in view, stepped squarely on the end of the wire. Instantly there was a blinding flash, and Meagan was sent hurtling away from the spot as though dynamite had exploded beneath his feet!

"Live wire! Live wire!" cried the repair men.

But they were too late. Poor Dummy Meagan had found it out. A terrific current of electricity had passed through his body. He was unconscious when Nick and Patsy leaped out of the car and reached him.

Even Perry Badmington showed interest enough in the incident to turn back and look at the shocked man. He recognized Nick Carter, too.

"Ah, Mr. Carter! were you coming to my house? I have that signature for you."

But Nick had no attention to spare from the injured man at the moment.

"Send for an ambulance. He must go to the hospital," suggested Badmington.

"Here!" exclaimed Nick, "what's the matter with our taking him around to your house, Mr. Badmington, until a doctor arrives? The street is no place for a man who may be dying."

"Why—why—if you think it necessary, Mr. Carter," stammered the wealthy man.

"Pick him up, boys," said Nick, and with the help of Danny and Patsy, he raised poor Dummy Meagan and carried him around the corner into the handsome residence that Rufus Badmington had built on Riverside Drive, and which his nephew had fallen heir to.

Nick took charge in this emergency, and sent the rich man's servants on his bidding without asking any permission. He ordered the footman to fetch a doctor, or two if he could find them, and told one of the maids to bring the articles which he thought the physicians might need when they arrived.

Meagan had been laid on the couch in the library, and Perry Badmington hung about, interested and disturbed, and perhaps not a little vexed that Nick should have taken such a high hand in the matter.

The doctors came. Meagan, Nick knew, was still alive; but he had no means of knowing how seriously he was hurt. The physicians went to work upon him at once, however, and they very soon made a surprising discovery.

The shock of electricity had deprived the man of consciousness, but it really, saving a few superficial burns on the bottom of his foot and up the leg and arm, had not done the fellow any permanent harm. They brought him back to consciousness in half an hour.

Meagan rose up, helped by the physician's arm, and stared wildly about the library. His lips writhed convulsively, and then—hoarsely, and in a tone that lacked all harmony—he spoke!

"What—what happened?" he demanded.

Nick started back in amazement, and the hitherto dumb man saw and recognized the detective.

"Mister Carter! I know you!" he stammered. Then he suddenly laughed wildly. "Hear me!" he shouted. "Hear me talk!"

The wonder struck them all dumb for the moment. The electric shock had loosened the man's tongue, so long paralyzed. The physicians, who instantly understood the case, warned him to lie down again and remain quiet.

But Meagan's eyes fell upon the interested face of Perry Badmington. He started and cried out Nick's name again.

"Mr. Carter! There is the man you want," he said, pointing with a shaking hand at the head of the firm of chemists. "That is Burchard—the man to whom I gave Pete's letter. That's him!"

He dropped back on the couch, weak and faint, and the footman came to the door to announce the arrival of the ambulance from the hospital. The physicians, who had heard all about Meagan, and his misfortune, from Nick, declared that there was a strong hope that the electric shock would have benefited the man in other ways beside speech. At least, a course of treatment at the hospital, and proper food and care, might aid him to overcome his extreme nervousness, and the St. Vitus dance spasms.

At a signal from Nick, Patsy and Danny left the house when Meagan was carried out. Badmington had remained at the far end of the library since the man who had been dumb made his accusation. Nick, when they were alone, approached him.

"Mr. Badmington," he said, "the regaining of speech on the part of that dumb man was almost a miracle. And his accusation, I would have considered quite as impossible, had he made it twenty-four hours ago. But I have learned a good deal about you during these twenty-four hours. You need not show me the signa-

ture of your uncle that you obtained to-day. I know how you got it. Larry Miggs is in jail.

"I am also aware that you have been showing me specimens of Pete Lorimer's handwriting, instead of John Badmington's, because you knew that Pete had faked me with a forged memorandum. Knowing these things, you, therefore, know the real hiding place of the valuable formulas which John Badmington hid. Don't deny it. You may even have that paper in your possession now. I want it, Mr. Badmington! And I am going to have it, you may be sure. The coil of circumstances, now completely wrapped about you by Meagan's testimony, would ruin you if they were made public in the press. You are a man just entering upon a situation of great trust and much power. There is a life of usefulness and influence before you—if you will do the right thing!

"Take warning by your Uncle John. He wasted his life because he yielded to dissipation while a young man. He had no chance to recover his own, or his family's self-respect. You can do the one, and have never lost the other. Nobody—none of your family, or your business associates—suspects your dissipation. You can stop now, and you must.

"If you give up this document, that never belonged to Badmington & Badmington, and which you know very well is the real property of the unfortunate man now in the Tombs accused of your Uncle John's murder—if you give it up, I promise to say nothing of your past life—some of which, and the blackest of which, I know, and more of which I suspect.

"For instance, I know that you are addicted to taking some drug that is sapping your life, both physically and mentally. To take this drug and be undiscovered by your friends, you engaged a furnished flat in the Tenderloin section of the town, and went by an assumed name there.

"To this place you retired to enjoy the bitter pleasures of the drug. You mixed with crooks and thieves. You became acquainted with Miggs and Pete Lorimer. Pete must have learned what your real name was, and when he saw the name 'Badmington' on the real memorandum which your Uncle Hubbs found in room three hundred and thirteen of the Deccan House, he remembered you and determined to turn his knowledge to good account. But the game is up. I have told you a pretty straight story of your connection with the affair, have I not?" demanded the detective.

Badmington nodded. He could not speak.

"Give me the document belonging to Milton J. Hyburn, then," commanded Nick.

Still without a word, Badmington crossed to the little safe set into the library wall, unlocked it, and drew forth the document in question—the paper that had really cost the lives of two men and was likely to cause a third to end his in the electric chair!

"Where did John Badmington really hide this paper?" asked Nick.

"In box eighteen-twelve of the Franklyn Safety Deposit Vaults," replied Perry Badmington. "He merely changed the name of the depository when he wrote the memorandum he gave you."

A little later Nick left the Badmington premises—and glad he was to end his connection with everybody by that name!

He was able to put the valuable formulas in the hands of Mr. D'Ellery, Milton J. Hyburn's lawyer, and that gentleman placed them with chemists who were willing to advance large sums to Hyburn for the use of the inventions of his father, in their business.

D'Ellery used some of the money to carry on the fight he was making for Hyburn's life, and to pay Nick for his work. D'Ellery was successful in his great fight, too. It was one of the most remarkable trials of recent criminal and legal history. Hyburn could not be saved from punishment; but the jury agreed on a term of imprisonment which might be shortened by good conduct and might even be commuted some day by the governor of the State. The man was guilty of John Badmington's death; but he had been greatly wronged, and nursing his grievance had apparently unsettled his reason to some extent and driven him to the crime.

THE END.

The next case that Nick Carter is called upon to handle gives him a decidedly hard nut to crack. You'll say so yourself. You'll wonder, too, if it is possible for him to "get away with it," as Patsy Grogan might say. The story is told in a very entertaining manner, under the title of "The Vampire's Prey; or, Nick Carter's Blow at Policy." Now you can see that this is a hard nut to crack. Is there any harder one than policy? Nick doesn't go about it in an ordinary way—you can count on that. This "play" he does on a matchless detective instinct and a resolute purpose to hit at a big injustice. Chick, Dorine, Patsy, and Pinkeye do their share, and do it well. Nick Carter Company, No. 186, is the one in which this new brand of adventures are set forth. This is a number that you should make sure of getting.

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WITH A MADMAN IN MIDAIR.

"LOOK!" screamed Jackson, as excitably as if he'd seen a [illegible]. "Look, you fellows! What is it?"

"Where?"

"The other side of the trees. It's going up the [illegible] adrift!"

[illegible] while we struggled for a view the clouds opened and a [illegible] from sky to earth. A deafening thunder crash followed, and we involuntarily [illegible] under cover of the shed where we had sought [illegible] the storm.

[illegible] rattled down again. But our glimpses of [illegible] balloon had roused a curiosity not to be de[illegible] rain.

[illegible]

[illegible] he cried—and of course we fol[illegible].

[illegible] in full view. [illegible] the balloon was [illegible] now scudding before the wind, now high, now low.

[illegible] luck I overhauled it first.

"[illegible] no one in it!" I shouted. "It's adrift, and the [illegible] won't hold a bit in this gale."

[illegible] the rope that held the anchor, and skidded [illegible] balloon.

"[illegible] idiot!" yelled Barker, coming up with a [illegible]

[illegible] for the next instant the [illegible] and whirled it upward, [illegible] my stup[illegible] realized my danger. I was [illegible] in midair.

"Help me, somebody! Help!" I yelled.

[illegible] reach me? I was so amazed that I [illegible] when I heard a voice [illegible]:

"[illegible] Cutler! [illegible] [illegible] downward, or you'll dash my face in."

[illegible] Barker's voice. I dared not look down—I felt [illegible] as it was—but I knew that he must have [illegible]

"[illegible]" cried Barker [illegible]. "[illegible] into the car. Up you go! You can do it if you try, but keep your eyes up. Don't look down at me, as you value your neck—and mine."

"I—I've got no breath—for climbing!" I gasped. "I—I'm pumped!"

Indeed, the breath had been buffeted out of my body by our rapid upward progress. Fortunately the wind dropped at that moment, and our course changed to a gentle, horizontal one.

"Now's your time!" yelled Barker. "Up you go, or down you come. I can't hang here any longer."

I set my teeth, clutched the wicker of the car, and dragged my body up a foot.

"Go ahead," encouraged Barker. "Tumble in head first."

Another pull and my head was on a level with the car. A third effort and——

A hand reached out of the car and clutched me by the hair. I screamed and loosened my hold. The grip on my hair tightened, and another hand caught me by the arm, or I [illegible] fallen.

"Ballast!" shrieked a voice from the car. "Ballast! [illegible] want more ballast!"

I clutched hold of a loose rope.

"Spring!" cried the voice.

[illegible] help rendered by the man in the car, to fall into the bottom, [illegible].

When I regained my senses, Barker was in the car talking to [illegible] the [illegible].

The balloon was rocking lazily in a suffocating calm. I felt stifled and tried to stand up to fill my lungs. But I couldn't move. I was sitting in the bottom of the car, my [illegible] pulled up to my [illegible] with a strong cord. I was helpless.

"Barker," I said, "who put this cord around me?"

"[illegible]" [illegible] the man. "[illegible] more ballast. Lovely ballast."

Barker caught my eye, put his fingers to his lips, then significantly tapped his forehead.

From the first I gleaned that I was not to speak, from the latter that our companion was not quite accountable for his actions.

"Oh, we'll go down beautifully [illegible]," said our companion.

"[illegible]," agreed Barker. "[illegible]"

I could see that Barker was humoring the man, who [illegible] a little axe which lay at the bottom of the car, began to swing it around his head.

"Cut the ropes!" he cried. "[illegible] we'll descend beautifully when the ropes are cut!"

I was chilled with horror. The axe swung round among the cordage that held the car to the balloon. If the madman succeeded in his purpose we should be dashed to atoms.

"Barker," I shouted, despite his warning. "[illegible] he's doing! Stop him!"

The man looked down at me contemptuously.

"[illegible] captain of [illegible]," he [illegible]. "You're ballast, [illegible]. Keep your [illegible], or over you go."

[illegible] his face. His [illegible] running from [illegible] lip was smeared with crimson. [illegible] in his eyes and his [illegible] frightened [illegible] ful threat.

[illegible] balloon.

"The captain is right," said he. "[illegible] shut, Cutler, or over you go."

[illegible]

scend beautifully. Now, you"—pointing to Barker—"stand by and give a hand. How far are we from earth?"

"Two hundred yards."

"Then I'll cut the ropes, and we shall drop in no time. You stand by, young man, and instantly the anchor touches throw over the ballast"—he glanced at me—"or we'll be dashed to pieces."

The axe swung round with renewed energy, but the blows on the cordage from the blunt edge only jerked the balloon about and made the car quiver. Still any moment he might discover his error and turn the axe about. The consequences made me feel sick.

"Barker," I whimpered, "what will become of us?"

A puff of wind caught the balloon and sent it spinning along. The madman felt it.

"The storm's coming on," he said. "If I don't cut these cords at once we'll never reach home again."

As he spoke a flash of lightning flew across our faces, heavy drops of rain spluttered against the car, while the thunder and the wind chimed in simultaneously. That horrible dead calm had not been the end of the storm.

The balloon began to creak and rock as we were driven erratically before the wind. The madman, with difficulty keeping his feet, swung his axe.

Snap went the cord! The axe was right edge forward now.

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "We shall do it yet."

"Here goes!" muttered Barker desperately, hanging onto the ropes. "We can only die, anyway."

The man raised his arm for a second blow.

"Look out!" cried Barker. "I've opened the air valve. Hang on, or I'll pitch you overboard."

Barker's warning was unnecessary. The balloon began to drop like a lump of lead, and the man promptly sat down—on the top of me. I was never so terrified in my life. Even a glance at Barker's unflushed face as he stood clinging to the ropes, measuring our distance, did not lend me courage. It was my last minute, I knew, but the only thing I could attempt to do was to prevent my stomach leaping into my mouth.

"Look out for the bump!" shouted Barker. "Unless the wind stops us——"

The man sprang to his feet, a bag of ballast in each arm.

"The captain did it," he grinned. "Captain Dicksey did it beautifully."

He leaned over the edge of the car. The wind mercifully caught the balloon and drove it forward, upsetting our companion and his ballast. He was pitched out headlong. The next instant the car bumped the ground.

"What a beastly narrow shave," said Barker, as we rebounded into the air. "If that fellow hadn't jumped out with those bags——"

We touched the ground again and rebounded while he was speaking.

"Cut me free, Barker," I implored. "Don't let me die like a rat in a trap."

He severed the cord with the axe.

"It's each for himself now, Cutler," he said. "If we get near to the ground again—jump."

But the storm had heightened, and the wind was in a fury. To cling to the car was no easy matter, as it rolled, and bent, and shook.

We were driven over a hill and across a meadow—now within a few yards of soil, now far above. Twice we caught momentarily in a tree, but the wind drove us away before we could escape by that means.

Suddenly Barker called out:

"It's water, Cutler; we're making for the river."

It was already in view.

"If we only escape that tall hedge——"

A mighty gust of wind dragged us free of it.

"It's a ducking, old fellow," cried Barker. "Thank Heaven you can swim! If we only fall within twenty feet of the river—dive! Do you hear?"

I heard, but my teeth were chattering, and I made no reply.

"Ready," he cried excitedly; "we're dropping. The wind will soon swoop us down. Look out for yourself; get between the ropes—if you get mixed up you're done for—and jump clear. Here we are! Look out! Ready—spring! Spring, I say! Oh, you idiot! Jump!"

I did not jump. I was too paralyzed to do so, but I tumbled forward between the ropes into the water, assisted by Barker's foot. Almost at the same instant I felt Barker fly over me. The car swished into the river, and in an agony of fear I dashed forward my hands. I knew no more until I returned to consciousness on the bank.

Barker was leaning over me. Captain Dicksey, the aëronaut, was telling his tale:

"I ascended with my friend about an hour before the storm, but without sufficient ballast to withstand the gale. The balloon was carried so high that we were half frozen, and the blood spurted from our ears and noses. When I attempted to descend I placed my friend on one side of the car, and took up my position at the other, and we agreed to jump out at a given signal. I jumped, my friend hesitated, and before anything could be done the balloon had soared upward again. The poor fellow's subsequent agony of fear which he suffered after I left must have temporarily turned his brain."

Anyhow, I know that he is sane enough to-day.

MICHIGAN BEAR HUNTING.

Common black bear are becoming such a menace to farm stock in the woods of northern Michigan that hunting parties are being extensively organized to exterminate them. The bounties which have from time to time been offered by the various boards of supervisors have proved ineffectual as a stimulus to individual hunters, and throughout the territory lying along the Saginaw Bay and extending to the Straits of Mackinaw farther north along the Lake Huron shore Bruin and his family have been thriving on choice lamb and sheep, pigs, veal, calves, honey, etc., all summer long.

It is the approach of fall, when a spark starts a ragging forest fire, that has caused organized effort to be made to rid the countryside of the beasts. In Arenac County alone over four hundred sheep were killed last fall by the bears which had been driven out of the swamps and woods by the fierce forest fires which swept so large a portion of the State.

Their fighting qualities were amply demonstrated to the employees on Bradley, Prescott & Co.'s sheep ranch, overlooking Stiles Lake, during the prevalence of the fires which swept all that territory traversed by the Detroit and Mackinac Railroad in eastern Michigan last autumn.

This ranch covers thousands of acres of fine grazing land, partly plains dotted with lakes, streams, and swamps; but everywhere the low jack pine interspersed with scrub oak is in evidence. At the headquarters are located the long sheep shed and a big inclosure surrounded by an eight-foot wire fence, in which from eight thousand to ten thousand sheep are herded. Near by is the residence of the superintendent, Tom French, where the men employed in caring for the sheep also live.

Above the Roll of Thunder.

One night early in October French was awakened by a noise resembling distant thunder. His first thought was that at last the clouds were to open and quench the flames whose smoke had been coming nearer and nearer day by day, but as he lay awake waiting for the pleasing patter of the rain the thunder changed its keynote and his feelings of relief gave way to wonder and then to anxiety.

Above the thunderous roll came to his ear the bleating

of the lambs, and as it came nearer he could distinguish the pitiful cries of the sheep and then the growling, hoarse cry of bears as they attacked the animals. Rousing the other men and bidding them secure their rifles, which were always loaded for emergencies, the foreman led the party into the woods. The half moon only partially lighted up the openings among the trees, the semi-darkness adding to the danger of their encounter.

The slaughter was going on at a rapid rate, for at least a dozen bears were attacking the flock. The men opened fire, but stopped when they realized they were liable to kill many of their sheep, so closely were they huddled together.

Drawing their long hunting knives, the men plunged into the fray. They were met halfway by one bear much larger than the rest, which had been badly wounded by a bullet. He made a rush and with one swoop of his paw ripped the shirt from a man's back and sent the blood spurting from four long, deep gashes. The foreman himself was immediately engaged in a death struggle with another bear, whose viselike embrace was only broken after repeated knife thrusts finally succeeded in reaching a vital spot.

Vanished in the Darkness.

With the exception of two men who had fled, the others were by this time practically surrounded by bears. Hand-to-hand encounters were going on at once. Nearly every man had his clothing ripped from him, while their faces were covered with blood. The tide of battle turned just in the nick of time, for almost on the instant that the foreman and the first man who had been attacked succeeded in killing their bears one of the other men had his arm broken by a savage blow from a paw, while the fourth had his hand badly lacerated and crushed in the mouth of the bear he was fighting.

By joining forces the men soon after succeeded in dispatching the remaining animals, but were not in the least disappointed at finding that some of the bears had disappeared in the darkness. By the time they had succeeded in stanching their wounds and had rested sufficiently to make the return trip to headquarters, approaching daylight disclosed the full extent of the murderous feast they had interrupted.

Close at hand were five dead bears and three dogs which would never again answer their master's call, while within a radius covering less than an acre were over fifty sheep, most of them dead and others so badly wounded they had to be killed.

BEES VERSUS MAN.

The wild bee of India is a formidable fellow, three times the size of our domestic or the Italian bee, and with a sting that often carries death with it, many natives succumbing to his poisoned dart.

The hives of these bees are enormous, and it takes a large amount of courage to attempt to raid them. It has been done, however.

Three men determined to climb down the rocks and get wild honey, and to this end they had a thickly wadded suit made, which one of them put on. He looked like an animated bolster; his head and face were carefully protected with netting, and he wore thick gauntlets. Thus equipped, his companions lowered him over the edge of the cliff, and down he went.

The warrior bees protected their property with might and main, and when the man was drawn up he was literally all over bees. But, thanks to the wadding, he was unhurt, and in turn the other two descended; they got bucketsful of honey—huge combs filled with the luscious stuff.

While riding through the jungle in search of game, hunters would often be stung to death were it not that the matiout always takes a blanket with him. The elephant, crashing along, knocks up against the stumps of trees where the wild bees have made their hives. Out they come in furious swarms. The elephant, with his hide of leather, cares not a jot for their stings, while the hunters instantly dive beneath the blanket.

The River Nerbudda at one part flows, or rather rushes, between cliffs of marble, and the crevices of these wonderful cliffs are the home of countless swarms.

A couple of sailors went down in a boat to see these marble rocks, and one of them was so fatally imprudent as to fire at a pigeon. The noise echoed from side to side, and disturbed the bees in their fastnesses. They came out, angrily buzzing, and descended upon the sailors, who soon saw what a reckless act the shot had been.

The men could not defend themselves from the myriads of their assailants, and were obliged to jump into the water and dive. But even this did not save them; the moment their heads appeared again the bees made for them. The men had to dive again and again; the current was very strong, and, becoming exhausted, they were finally both drowned.

You may remember Rudyard Kipling's description of one of these bee citadels in his "Jungle Book": "For centuries the Little People had hived and swarmed from cleft to cleft, and swarmed again, staining the white marble with stale honey, and made their combs tall and deep and black in the dark of the inner caves."

In California, where there are bee ranches, with perhaps five or six hundred hives, the grizzly bear is a foe to be dreaded. He is mad after honey, can climb like a monkey, and will ruin an apiary in no time. Stings have no effect upon him whatever, and the ranch owners have to use barbed wire fences to keep this formidable marauder off the premises, or set traps for him which kill him outright.

AN OIL LAKE IN A GULF.

Reports from ship captains entering the port of New York tell of a great and growing oil lake out in the Gulf of Mexico which is evidently fed from the oil deposits feeding the oil fields of Texas. While it is known this oil lake, situated about one hundred and sixty miles southeast of Galveston, has existed for several years, it is only recently that it has begun to spread out and is now reported to be more than one mile in diameter, while another ship captain said the surface of the water was covered with bubbling oil as far as their eyes could see.

The latest report is from Captain Netterton of the British steamship *Comedian*. He reports the oil bubbling from three distant jets in the gulf and says the oil deposit is thickening and spreading at a rapid rate. At this point the gulf is 5,400 feet, or over a mile, deep, and a tremendous pressure is required to force this heavy oil through this body of water for over a mile and then shoot it out in three streams.

A survey of the chart of the gulf and the oil fields shows that the lake in the gulf is in a direct line with the strata of oil from which the East Texas fields are supplied.

Whether the recent hurricane, plowing through the gulf, has punctured the oil strata, or whether the release of this immense quantity of oil is due to a subterranean earthquake or disruption, is not known. Some experts incline to the opinion that a terrific explosion in the bed of the gulf is responsible for this tapping of the oil in the bowels of the earth.

THE BOY KNEW WHY.

Important Person (after describing the great advantages now enjoyed by children): "I wish I were you boys at school." He paused, then added: "Why do I wish this?"

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